UNDER
THE
BED
EVA MARKS

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Under the Bed is a dark, steamy romance.
It contains explicit, disturbing, and graphic scenes and kinks intended for mature audiences only.

Full List of Trigger Warnings, Content Warnings and Kinks can be found on my website www.evamarkswrites.com.

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DEDICATION

If you’re looking for a green flag hero, Kaleb Leo Blackwood is not your guy.
He loves, lives, and fucks like the masked red flag he is.
Consider this your final warning.

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PLAYLIST

FJØRA — Cage
Saysh, Anderson Rocio — Know
Amy Stroup — In the Shadows
ADONA — Dark Things
Willyecho — Killer Inside of Me
TIMMS — No Place Like Home
UNDREAM, IOVA — Monster
Chloe Adams — Take Me to Hell
Jzzy — I'll Start with Your Name First
PI3RCE — Don't Fear the Reaper

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Even the monsters under the bed should fear *me*…

I've always been a freak in a mask. A cold-hearted psycho. Not fit for polite society.
But not in her eyes.
My stepsister, Shiloh, is everything I'm not. Kind. Sweet. Innocent. She took one look at me and saw someone worth saving.
So, when she was assaulted and justice wasn't served, I took care of it.
I became justice.
That earned me eleven years in a psychiatric hospital. Everyone thought I'd be there for life.
They were wrong.
Now that I'm out, I want revenge. I'm going to destroy everyone who dared to hurt my girl while I was gone.
But not before I'm taking what's mine, and that's Shiloh.
Because even though I'm a sick, twisted monster, I'm *her* monster.
We *will* be together.
Whether she realizes it yet or not…

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PROLOGUE

SHILOH

ELEVEN YEARS AGO

They're about to take him away. About to rip him from my life.

My tummy aches. I think I might be sick.

Worse than that.

I might never see him again.

Kaleb Leo Blackwood.

My best friend.

My stepbrother.

It's my fault he's here in the first place. In this courtroom. Sitting at the defendant's table, as Daddy called it.

It's my fault his days as a free boy are over.

My bones shake. A sob threatens to rip from me. I bite the inside of my cheek to hold it in.

I have to be brave.

I'm all I've got now.

Sure, I have one living parent, my dad. A stepmom. Our staff. We all live together in our mansion in Medina, Washington. Not here, in Seattle, where the court is.

In the city where Kaleb killed two kids.

I think I have a couple of friends other than that. The rest of the sixth graders I go to school with don't talk to me.

People. They're just people who are physically close to me. They don't care about me.

Only Kaleb does. He's been the one to show me what it feels like to be truly cared for over the past five months.

No more of his friendship. His comforting silence. His kindness.

My fault. Those were my tears that slipped out, and he saw them.

Shiloh, who did this to you?

He wouldn't let me go until I told him what happened.

The memory of his voice is clear in my ears. As loud as the guilt that suffocates me. It hurts everywhere, knowing it's my fault.

I should've kept my mouth shut.

If I had, we wouldn't be here waiting for them to declare him criminally insane. Without a trial. Without a jury.

Criminally insane.

Because of my father. He called everyone he knew to make sure everything would be wrapped up quickly.

No press coverage, do you hear me? I'll sue and ruin any news outlet that dares tarnish my name.

Kaleb isn't insane. I say that to my dad all the time, but he never listens. He hates both of us.

"All rise."

I'm quick to do as the bulky bailiff says. I'm a kid, just eleven years old. I've been taught to listen to adults or else.

And this adult's command is loud. It's made louder as it bounces off the wood walls of the courthouse.

But the rest of the people here aren't as scared as I am. No, they rise slower.

Maybe their daddies never got mad at them for taking too long.

Maybe.

Mine sure has.

Mine doesn't fear anything or anyone. Wearing one of his expensive blue suits, he rises last.

Right after Astrid, Kaleb's mom. She's dressed in a white skirt and blazer, her blonde hair twisted at the nape of her neck. Her golden eyes, which are so much like Kaleb's, are fixed on my father.

Daddy ignores her. His brown gaze is locked on the judge.

I wish we were the only people here.

We aren't.

On the other side of the aisle, already standing, are the so-called victims' parents.

Before them stands the old district attorney. He has gray hair, and his assistant is a blonde lady. My stomach is in knots. I hate them so much.

I hated them as soon as they walked into my home this past week.

Even more so when both of them left, smiling, each holding a large suitcase they had received from Daddy. They laughed like they were sharing a joke or something.

A mean joke.

Other people visited Daddy after them. They're here—the two lawyers who were supposed to help Kaleb. To *make everything blow over and fast*, my father told them.

Scarlett, the first lawyer, has dark eyes and darker hair pulled into a tight ponytail. Grayson, the second one, has brown hair and blue eyes.

They look so much alike. Shoulders squared. Gray suits. Serious expressions.

They stand, too. Of course, they do.

The last person I recognize here as Daddy's friend is Judge Gwyneth. She just walked into the court now. Black robe. White hair. Green eyes. She's smiling.

What is she smiling about?

Oh, she's looking at my dad.

She can do whatever she wants. I don't care about her anymore.

Kaleb. I care about him.

While everyone rises, he stays in his seat.

My savior. My hero.

The person I'm about to lose today.

"Get up, Son," Dad growls at him.

Scarlett's hand is already on Kaleb's shoulder, demanding that he rise.

He listens to no one.

She still tries.

That's what she's being paid for.

Fighting for his freedom sure isn't it. Kaleb and I watched an episode of *Law & Order* the other day. While I didn't understand everything on the

show, I know it didn’t look like this:

“Bad people who embarrass our family should be kept locked away,” Daddy said. Astrid cried louder. I heard them in their room. “Fine, not in prison. A psychiatric hospital. That fiend. He’s bad for our image.”

At that, she stopped crying.

I couldn’t. Was Daddy right? Was I friends with a bad person for five months? I didn’t think so. But my father wouldn’t stop screaming at me that I’m stupid and that Kaleb will hurt me.

No.

No.

Maybe?

A tear slips past my eye, rolling down my cheek. Scarlett, the lawyer, whispers something to Kaleb and he finally gets up.

From where I stand, I see his solemn face. His dark brown hair has been cut short on the sides and is longer on top. His golden eyes stare straight ahead. His sharp jaw is clenched tight and his full lips are pinched shut. The muscles in his arms and shoulders stretch his deep blue suit.

He did a terrible, terrible thing.

Ripping the hearts of the two kids who attacked—*assaulted*, the detective who interviewed me called it at first, before she said it was nothing—me.

Hiding two of their chopped fingers in a shoebox in my closet was weird. People don’t do that. Then he told me it was my gift. *Our little secret.*

It didn’t seem like a bad thing at the time. Maybe I was wrong about that. I feel like I’ve been wrong about everything lately.

A few people called my stepbrother a monster when we walked into court today. They didn’t get close—not them, not the photographers. Daddy’s security held them back and smashed their cameras.

What he couldn’t stop was the police raiding our home. He did nothing when so many policemen and women and squad cars arrived at our house to drag Kaleb away less than two weeks ago.

A fifteen-year-old boy.

We have footage of him leaving the scene. His hands were bloody. We have fingerprints on their hearts and the cleaver, Mr. and Mrs. Talbot. We have a warrant for it. For his DNA as well.

The boy is a monster.

No.

Dad repeats it, though. He's just like the people who waited outside for us to arrive today. Even Kaleb's mom didn't visit him in his cell. She said it was too long of a drive from our home in Medina. It wasn't. I know she lied.

He isn't a monster. Can't be.

Yes, he's taller than everyone in the courthouse. Larger too. They avoid looking him in the eye.

I've always been grateful for that. He's a wall, protecting me whenever Dad yells at me. Kaleb is the reason I haven't been slapped for the past five months.

We've been spending hours together. Just me and my big brother.

Unlike Dad, I don't mind at all when Kaleb's wearing the white mask I clutch between my fingers now. The one with the fake brown hair that's a lot messier than his is. With the creepy black holes for his eyes.

It's cool. *He's* cool.

He's there for me and listens to me. He helps me assemble so many jigsaw puzzles when we play in my room together.

Kaleb has never laid a hand on me. Never touched me like Connor and Lee did. Other than carrying me to bed when I fell asleep on the couch in our living room, he never hurt me.

He cared when no one else did.

Shiloh, who did this to you?

"You may be seated." This is Judge Gwyneth.

Everyone sits.

Everyone other than Kaleb.

The worry that he'll get into more trouble makes my throat burn. "Kaleb, please, sit down."

He looks over his shoulder.

Oh, no.

His eyes are almost as dark as the ones on his mask.

The judge clears her throat. "Mr. Blackwood."

Please, I mouth, feeling Dad's fury building beside me.

Kaleb cuts his gaze to him before finally sitting.

The judge starts talking about the case and the plea deal in big words that I have trouble understanding. I know what they mean, anyway.

My stomach aches. My gut twists. I'm sweating, shaking.

Kaleb scares me. Losing him scares me.

Judge Gwyneth goes on, even though I'm about to throw up. She doesn't care that she's about to leave me alone in the world. That she's about to lock up the only person I love.

Bad people who bring shame to our family should be locked away.

I stop myself from shaking my head at Daddy's words.

It'll make him mad if I act out. And Kaleb won't be there to protect me when he punishes me.

I won't be there to be his only friend. His little sister.

Who will care about him there? Will I ever be allowed to visit?

He'll be alone. Both of us will.

Anger is another painful emotion. I wish I didn't feel it. I do.

Kaleb didn't have to kill these boys. We could've stayed together. Before that, Kaleb's mom always managed to convince Daddy to let him stay.

I owe him that much, she used to say.

Then Kaleb got arrested.

He *chose* to leave me.

My fingers dig into the latex of his mask, tighter than ever.

Why did you do it?

I'm confused. Everything hurts.

Judge Gwyneth's voice cuts through my thoughts. "…not guilty on the offenses charged in the indictment for the cause of insanity, as per the plea bargain."

"No!" a woman screams.

"Our babies!" another wails, her voice shattered.

Did no one tell them how this would end? Like they told us?

"Order." *Bam! Bam! Bam!* The judge slams her gavel.

Kaleb starts to turn toward me. Grayson, with a hand on his nape, silently begs him to look straight. Kaleb growls.

"We didn't agree to this!" The man drowns out the bailiffs.

People talk and shout. They're so loud. They're inside my head.

It'll explode any second now.

"That's right!" one of the dads to my right shouts. My heart hammers. Kaleb only shrugs. "We get to have a say in this."

When the screaming and crying continue, the judge slams the gavel again. "Remove them from my courtroom."

“We’re the victims’ parents,” the first woman calls out. “You can’t throw us out.”

“Out.” The judge jerks her head. Now that I really look at her, I’m sure I’ve seen her around the house once or twice in the past. She’s one of Daddy’s many friends.

“No! No!”

Scuffling. Growling. Crying.

The room is filled with them.

Then it’s quiet.

So.

Very.

Quiet.

“Please rise.”

The three of them are on their feet.

“Kaleb Leo Blackwood.”

His hands move at his front, closing the buttons of his suit jacket.

The one he won’t be wearing much longer.

Instead of fisting his mask, I hug it to my body. Daddy scoffs at my side, but I ignore him.

I’ll pay for it later.

I will.

Now, I need comfort. I need him.

I won’t have him. The judge is saying that he’s going to a psychiatric hospital.

Where he’ll stay until…

Until…

No one knows.

Daddy hopes it’s for the rest of his life.

Yesterday, Kaleb’s mom finally said that she hoped so, too.

If it were up to me…

“Kaleb,” I sob his name when the men lead him out. “Kaleb, please. Please!”

Please, don’t leave me.

Or…please, go away. I don’t want you to kill me.

He twists his head. His stare is sharp, slicing into me.

The pain in my tummy intensifies. Invisible knives slash through me.

They drag him, yet he won’t stop looking at me. He needs me to say something, I’m sure of it. Kaleb begs me to say what it is I want.

I bet that if I asked, he’d run away with me right this minute.

He’s bad news, Shiloh. You’d do well to forget him, or you’d end up like those kids. Dead without their hearts and some of their fingers.

I wish Kaleb would stay. I wish he wouldn’t kill me if he did.

What should I do?

What should I do?

“Let’s go, Shiloh.” Daddy’s hand clamps around my arm. Too strong. Too tight.

I can’t say a thing.

Kaleb growls as they take him far, far, far from me.

“Take it.” I thrust my hand out to him, holding the mask out.

He’s nowhere near me, though. He’ll never be able to reach it.

He glances at it.

For a second.

Then, his dark glare lands on my face.

“Don’t worry, little sister.” His voice is as cold as a Seattle winter.

Goosebumps prickle on my body. My breath catches in my throat. “I’ll be back for you.”

He’s being hauled out. They’re rough. Mean.

They’re upsetting me. Making my chest hurt.

Kaleb pays them no mind.

“I promise you.” His lips curl. “Whatever it takes, I’ll come back for you.”

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1

KALEB

ELEVEN YEARS LATER—PRESENT DAY

"Enjoy your field trip, Kaleb." Dr. Reynolds's grin stretches across his wrinkled face. The therapist who's been assigned to me since my first day at Berkshire Psychiatric Hospital.

Clouds gather above our heads, casting a gray light on this gray day. The autumn chill seeps under our clothes. A constant breeze whistles in the forest surrounding the hospital I've been locked up in for the past eleven years. Orange leaves either withstand the wind or fall to the ground.

In other words, just your typical October day in one of Washington's forests.

Or so I lead the group of idiots to believe.

After all, there's nothing different about me, either, is there? I look the same. In my blue coveralls. Sticking to the same silence I've maintained—mostly—throughout my entire stay here. Throughout my life, actually.

In the face of my silence, my delusional doctor pushes his square-rimmed glasses up his nose. A tentative, shaky smile takes over his

confident grin.

My presence unnerves him. I also pique his interest. An enigma he's dying to solve.

That's good. Otherwise, I would've been transferred to an adult facility long ago. I'm twenty-six, not a minor anymore.

Doc Reynolds said so. A few months before my eighteenth birthday, he told me he was trying to keep me here. That they wanted to move me to an institution in another *state*.

Since then, I've been feeding him breadcrumbs that meant nothing. Anything to get me to stay here.

It worked. The fucking breadcrums have kept me here instead of being shipped off to Florida.

Halfway across the country.

Far from *her*.

Shiloh.

I suppress a snarl.

No one will derail my plans to be reunited with her.

Even though we haven't been in contact for years. Ever since the trial.

Still. Fucking still.

I've never forgotten about her. Had to stay nearby.

It broke me when my source—a former prisoner in this hellhole—informed me her dad sent her away to LA. The distance hurt worse than a dozen punches to my ribs. And I should know.

But that's all behind us. She's back in Seattle.

The perfect timing for me to break out of here.

To find her.

So many things. So many vile, deplorable things I want and will do to her.

My little stepsister who isn't so little anymore.

I've had her watched over the years. Her photos are what fueled the change in me.

Those large blue eyes. Her lush brown hair that reaches her shoulders. My favorite photo out of the three was taken at her home, in Seattle, on Christmas day two years ago.

She's grown into a beautiful woman while I've been stuck here.

While I've become even more possessive of her.

My obsession with her has morphed into something far more sinister than it was years ago.

Strange, I agree. I never *feel*.

Then again, I never met anyone like Shiloh. She does things to my cold heart.

Other than love and protectiveness, there's anger. She didn't stick up for me in court. Or when the ADA came to our house for the under-the-table plea deal.

It wouldn't have changed anything, but fuck. I wanted to hear her say *my brother isn't guilty. He's done the right thing.*

There's also lust and a violent need to own her body.

She'll be the first person I've ever been with sexually.

And I will be with her. In any way that counts.

Bullshitting Dr. Reynolds did the trick, landed me this escape opportunity.

I haven't been out in years. Eleven, Doc Reynolds. Send me out there for an hour. A secured ride around the forest. I'll have plenty to share after that. I'll tell you all about why I am the way I am.

The next morning, I had my day trip scheduled.

One I'm never coming back from.

"Well, then." He clasps his hands before him. A bead of sweat slips between them, landing on the ground. He's really excited, the fool; thinks this is his big break. "Should this experiment be successful, this trip won't be the last."

A snort to my right. Dick—name suits him fucking right, the bastard. My most hated guard. The man who's escorting me on this ride.

The asshole loves ridiculing my mask. Mocks me whenever he digs up the three photos I have hidden in my room. He doesn't think Shiloh's ugly or anything like that. No one ever could.

It pisses him off that I smuggled them in through back channels. That Dr. Reynolds lets me have them, even though the rules don't permit it.

Jerome's name will never leave my lips. We're the same age. Grew up here together. Only difference is, he was released at eighteen. I'm sure he hasn't stopped committing crimes on the outside. He just doesn't get caught.

I sure as fuck won't be the reason he gets sent back here. Other than as a visitor, that is.

A visitor who slips me gifts. Gifts that come with a price that I'll have to pay once I'm on the outside.

"You'll fail, freak."

I turn to Dick, the sneaky fuck who stole two precious items from my room this morning.

His narrowed, beady brown eyes stare back at me.

He reeks of fear. He hates it when I glare at him in silence. I do that whenever I can.

When he goes through my stuff. When he checks for shivs or pills. He sneers and curses, trying to mask the terror he can't shake.

That part, this weakness when it comes to me, is what he hates the most. The bald asshole has been holding a grudge against me since the moment we met.

It doesn't help that I keep stealing his baton—and beating him with it—without consequence.

They almost never sedate me here, no matter what. Unless it's that time of year. That one night when I'm at my worst, that's when they stick that needle into my arm.

Other than that…

Kaleb is on the path to healing, Dick. He's been isolated from the rest of the patients in his room for the past five years. We'd be doing him a great disservice by punishing him. Electric shocks would only serve to spiral him. Take a day off to heal. Tomorrow, you'll be as good as new.

The loser heard that from Dr. Reynolds every time the latter broke up our fights. Despite the bruises on his face, ribs, and back. Regardless of how swollen his head was. The blood that often painted his lips red.

My doctor wouldn't let him hurt me.

He won't ever let him. He needs me.

Maybe he fantasizes about writing a book about me. Or he's curious about a twenty-six-year-old murderer who wears a mask for hours at a time.

Who cares?

Today, all of this ends.

The years I've spent locked up. Probed. Looked at. Questioned. The cuffs on my hands now are nothing new.

Done.

My fucking God, I can't wait to have this jumper off me. To kick off the white slip-ons.

This prisoner’s uniform, I’m so over it.

Good thing my driver seems to be about my size. He’s perched on the white minibus in a tan sweater, a pair of plain jeans, and leather boots. Waiting for us.

Apparently, he isn’t obligated to wear a uniform like Dick is. I didn’t plan on changing out of my clothes so soon. Couldn’t count on it.

But after twenty-six years of being shit out of luck, I lucked out. Who knew God had a conscience?

Dr. Reynolds should’ve assigned me another one to join us on this ride, at the very least. If he were a wise man. If he were any less obsessed with me, with needing to learn everything he can about me.

“Dick, this type of behavior is inappropriate and uncalled for.” My sixty-five-year-old psychiatrist stands there with Berkshire as his backdrop.

Inappropriate. Ha. What’s inappropriate is that Dick has my photo and mask hidden in his backpack.

What’s uncalled for was Dick waking me up before the crack of dawn. He did so to let me know he held my stuff hostage as a guarantee that I wouldn’t try anything funny.

Me? *Try*?

Only the weak *try*.

I *will* kill him. And there will be nothing funny about his death.

Anyway, I nodded, silently promising to be good. Dick laughed. He thought he had won. Still believes he has the upper hand since I haven’t snitched on him. As if I need Doc Reynolds for anything other than this stupid trip.

I’ll have Shiloh’s picture and my mask soon.

An identical mask to the one I wore back home. I’ll wear it throughout the arduous, hours-long walk home. Or while I drive the car that I’ll steal. Depending on how lucky I get.

One thing’s for sure.

I’ll get it back from Dick, and I’ll be wearing it when I break into her apartment. When I terrorize her.

When I take over her world.

Ruthlessly. Viciously. Completely.

No more hiding from me. Not-fucking-ever.

“But—”

“I’d appreciate it if you refrained from provoking Mr. Blackwood.”

Hate being called Mr. Blackwood. My dead father's name. I make no signs of showing my contempt, though.

"Yeah, yeah." An orange leaf detaches from its branch to my right, falling on top of Dick's bald head. He brushes it off. "Only the best for Mr. Blackwood."

Jesus, enough with that name.

"Good." My doctor pats down his green plaid shirt.

Another nervous gesture.

He's been studying me, true. I've learned all I could about him, too.

"Kaleb, what about you?" More shirt smoothing. More anxiety pouring out of him.

It's a direct reaction to the narrowing of my eyes and the slow drag of my hand along my short hair. The slower I move, his agitation intensifies, I've realized. A small payback for being treated like a bug under a microscope.

"It's going to be great, isn't it?" he prompts, the fool. "Just what you wanted."

Since he won't let me go unless I respond to his taunting, I nod. He returns it, fixing his glasses on his nose.

"Wonderful. See you in an hour, then."

See you never.

I turn around and start walking toward the van.

Dick wisely stays behind me as I drag my feet on the gravel. The metal chain connecting my ankle cuffs clinks with every step I make.

What a goddamn joke, believing they can restrain me. My growth spurt at eighteen shocked the hospital's GP. I'd filled out everywhere while getting taller at an inhuman speed.

At six-foot-five, I'm lean. Broad. What scares them the most is that I never had to put too much effort into it. It's my body's way of turning me into a bigger monster.

So much so that I'm sure I could still snap a person's neck. I haven't. Yet. The fuckers here have sedatives.

When they shoot them up my arm, I'm rendered useless. Nothing but flesh and bones.

They don't have a million guards and attendants in the van, though.

It'll be me against Dick and the driver.

Neither of them will have a chance to get to the syringe.

They’ll come face-to-face with the killer I was born to be.

I proved it before.

A few miles down the road, and I’ll prove it again.

And again.

And again.

And—

The driver presses the button to open the back door. He presses another button, and a ramp is lowered to the ground.

“Get in, freak,” Dick hisses. He’s close enough that I smell beef jerky on his breath, and the acrid smoke of his cigarettes.

He gets the same nod Doc Reynolds did. I climb the ramp to the van, shoulders slumped, head bowed. I’m hunched over so I can walk in without banging my forehead.

It’s also meant to trick him into believing he’s won. That I’ll stay seated on this bench I just sat down on. Won’t bother him throughout this trip.

A ruse he’s falling for.

His smug grin tells me as much.

People. They really ought to stop letting their feelings rule their actions.

“You and me…” He crouches at my feet, securing another cuff to my leg and then to the bench. He’s shaking it to make sure it won’t budge. That I won’t break free.

Laughable.

“We have some unfinished business to settle on the road.” As he yanks on the chain, his muscles bulge beneath his dark gray guard uniform. “A score to settle.”

I could end this right now. Kill him in a heartbeat without even using my hands.

So could he. A few blows to my head with his baton and I’d be done.

But this isn’t the right time. We have an audience.

Soon, though…

The ramp goes up. The door slides shut.

Dick is up on his feet, waving to Dr. Reynolds through the window.

While he’s busy playing my dutiful babysitter, I sneak a glance at the driver, assessing the threat up close. He’s in his forties. His blond hair is long, pulled into a low ponytail. Has to weigh over two-fifty, easy.

He doesn’t stand a chance against me.

Won’t be able to when I have a hard-on to fuck and torture and own my stepsister.

Nothing and no one will keep me from her.

Shiloh.

The van’s engine rumbles as we cross the gravel. It settles by the time we reach the paved road.

Maple trees line each side of the path. Orange and red leaves decorate their branches. They stand out against the gray skies, a simmering fire. Reminds me of the one that’s constantly burning inside my heart.

The scorching whisper that won’t let me be.

Shiloh. Shiloh. Shiloh.

“Just you and me, psycho.” Look at that chickenshit, staying way over there by the driver’s seat where he drops his bag. He’ll be safe there. Temporarily. “Mr. Driver, here—”

“Oswald,” the man behind the wheel huffs. As if that matters.

“Oswald.” Dick licks his upper lip, removing the baton from his belt and slamming it against his open palm. *Tap. Tap. Tap.*

An old, boring scare tactic. I used far superior ones when I terrorized Shiloh’s attackers.

They cried when I backed them into the school bathroom’s wall. I’d promised them we’d all attack Shiloh together, that this time, no one would stop us.

Then I locked the door behind me. And I put on my mask.

Then *I* was the one using my hands on them.

“He’s being paid to keep his mouth shut.” Dick laughs at me. “You can forget about him selling me out. I’m here to do whatever I want with you, at fucking last.”

He edges toward me. His voice lowers.

Am I supposed to tremble in fear? At this? Is this guy for fucking real?

I’d roll my eyes if I weren’t trying to bait him into coming closer.

I flinch as Dick towers over me. Roll my shoulders forward, curling into a ball.

“You’ve been a pain in my ass since day one.” There’s something else in his breath. On his clothes. Stale alcohol. I recognize it, thanks to my old man. “Fighting back. Being Doc’s favorite lunatic.”

Spittle flies all over my face.

I’ve survived worse.

“He isn’t here to protect you anymore.” His rage grows the farther we get from the hospital. Face turning purple. Eyes bulging.

There you go, loser. Let your anger take over.

“What do you have to say for yourself before I beat you black and blue?” He kicks my shin. “Huh? Huh? Huh?”

All I do is stare at him.

“Fucking freak.” His roar is a frustrated one.

He wishes I’d beg, cry, or apologize.

Yeah, no.

“Talk already! Why won’t you fucking talk?”

When we lived together, I *did* talk. I talked to Shiloh. The most I’ve spoken to anyone.

I haven’t in years. She hasn’t visited me. No one’s been allowed to—doctor’s order. She’s never written, either. Since I was only permitted to write to someone if that someone sent me a letter first…

She’ll be punished for it.

A bump in the road snaps me out of it.

Both Dick and I sway left. Right. Left.

We’re both settled again.

“Sblablendblada.”

The complete nonsense I spew has him scrunching his eyebrows. “What?”

“Sblablendblada.”

“Jesus fucking Christ.” The baton slams into my abdomen. “Louder.”

I cough. “Sblablendblada.”

“Motherfucker,” he says to himself. “Don’t really need to hear him. Don’t really care.”

Oh, he does care. Throughout the eleven years I’ve been locked up, I’ve barely spoken to anyone. Looks like Dick is just like the rest of them. Dying to know what goes on in my head.

Hasn’t he heard that curiosity killed the cat?

“Everything okay back there?” Oswald’s voice comes from miles away.

Nothing exists but me and my target.

“Mind your business, old man.” Dick’s lips form a fine white line as his hand tightens around the baton. Staring out the window, he considers his options.

He ends up choosing the worst one of them all.

He squats, one hand on his thigh. His lips are near my ear. Our cheeks almost touch. “Speak up, you fucking freak.”

His ear is close to my mouth.

He never sees me coming, but I’m coming anyway. My teeth latch onto his earlobe. Sharp. Cutting. Relentless.

At first, he gasps. He can’t believe that I’m doing this to him.

But I am. I double down on the bite, tasting Dick’s blood on my tongue.

You shouldn’t act so surprised, Dick. Nothing stopped me from biting off two kids’ fingers, either.

“N-no. No.” His brain and vocal cords finally join forces. The urgency is audible. “No, Kaleb. Stop it right now. No!”

“Yes,” I hiss through gritted teeth. Through the blood coating my tongue. “Yes.”

“Dick! What the—What the fuck.” Oswald splits his attention between us and the road, his arm on the back of his seat. “I’m pulling over.”

“No.” The desperation in Dick’s voice is delicious. “Don’t you dare. Keep driving. The closest police station. Get there. For backup. Otherwise, this psycho will break free.”

“I’ll call them, I’ll call—” Oswald’s attempt at being a helpful prick dies a miserable death. His cell slips out of his hand. Crashes on the floor. Slides past us to the end of the minibus. “Fuck! Fuck!”

“The radio,” Dick growls.

“Isn’t working.” The van swerves as Oswald’s panic rises. His head snaps back and forth. Voice shrill. “Been dead for a week! My cheap-ass boss! Damn it!”

“You.” When Dick makes a move to stand, a fresh wave of blood trickles down my shaved chin. “Let go. Let go, or I’ll beat you up. Split your head open.”

“Go ahead.” Talking is a struggle when my teeth are clamped on his ear. “But you’ll be doing it without an ear.”

“Oh God.” Oswald’s calls will forever go unanswered. I mean, He put him in this van with *me*, didn’t He? “Help us.”

My eyes slide to the writhing, panting Dick’s face. His complexion is pale, chin quivering.

I take advantage of his shock. His confusion.

I part my lips for a split second and lock them on the place where his ear connects to his body.

The taste is awful.

Shiloh, though, she has to taste sweet. As sweet as she looks. Plump lips. Her breasts are bigger and mouthwatering as fuck.

Mine.

My cock thickens as I imagine it's her tits I'm biting down on. The barbell on the tip grazes my boxer briefs. The same friend who'd gotten me Shiloh's pictures landed me the piercing.

The hole in my dick, that one was all me. All for Shiloh.

"Release me, or I'm biting your ear off." My speech is garbled as fuck. I spit blood as I talk. "Might even chew and swallow it if you take too long."

His pitiful gaze skates to the outside world.

"Calculating the distance to the station?" I grind my teeth left and right, sawing into his skin as I speak.

"Ye—No, no." On top of his blood, his sweat tastes foul in my mouth. Nasty. "Fuck you."

He curses and curses. Oswald groans, apologizing profusely. "I'm going as fast as I can!"

Both are lost to the moment. To the violence of it. The pain. The smell of blood swirling in the air.

Neither of them notices me sliding my fingers to the keychain on Dick's holster.

Fortunately for me, he chained me up long before today. I know which key goes where.

"Kaleb, let go, or I swear to God…"

I close two fingers on the one that'll free me. Into the lock it goes.

Click.

The handcuffs land in my lap.

"Hard way, it is." My hands are a collar around his throat. A constricting, lethal collar. I feel his muscles strain, his fight to get air in.

"Stop"—*shaky breath*—"the van."

Too little, way too late.

The driver can't hear him.

Even if he could, nothing could stop me. I shove Dick away from me at the same time that I rear my head back, taking his ear with me.

"M-my e-ear," he wheezes as I spit it out. It lands with a *thunk* on the floor. "My ear."

Without a word, and with every ounce of violence I have in me, I squeeze the life out of him.

"Keep going," I mimic Dick's voice as best I can, fooling Oswald into believing he's okay.

"Almost there." Oswald begins to turn his head toward us. I think fast, slinging one of Dick's arms over my neck. Adjust my grip. Hide my face. "Twenty minutes. Hang on."

His eyes are back on the road.

"Trying."

"Good."

Something inside Dick's throat snaps. A bone. He goes limp in my hold. I still bash his face into the back of the bench I'm sitting on. That part is purely recreational. Pure fun.

Smash. Smash. Smash.

Blood spray taints my jumper. His brain remains on the bench.

Can't say it was nice knowing you.

"Dick?" he asks, not looking back this time. Focusing on the curve in the road.

It gives me less than a minute to unlock my ankle cuffs.

I only need five seconds.

Free at last.

My heavy footsteps rattle the van.

They grab Oswald's attention.

"Dick, you got him?" He's hopeful, already imagining me thrown into another cell. Locked away from Shiloh. Never. "You did, didn't—"

Oswald's head is in my grip. I slam it into the driver door.

Over.

And over.

And over.

Gray brain matter mixes with his blood. Like Dick's back there, only better.

Because Oswald's terror is very much alive. He lives through the whole ordeal, and I get to hear his shrieks. See his arms flailing. Watch his body arch against his seatbelt when the van steers off course.

Left, left, left.

And…there it is. We're off the road, the van skating toward the trees, about to hit one.

Despite Oswald’s fingers grasping my wrists and how the van shakes, I’m not letting go. I’m devoted, an unstoppable force as I destroy what’s left of his head. I take great pleasure in watching him paint the glass red and gray.

Eventually, the inevitable collision happens. We crash into a tree, and I fly over to the other side, leaving dead Oswald in his seat.

I land on the opposite side of the door, listening to the engine cough.

A normal person would’ve been in pain by now. Would’ve been hurt. Severely.

I’ve never been normal.

Even when my bastard father was alive and beat me up. I got bruised. Bled. But no broken bones. No cracked ribs. Nothing actually hurt. I just hated being overpowered, but I could take a beating.

Easy.

Only time I knew what real pain was, was when I met Shiloh. My obsession with her is a constant stab to the gut. A hole in my chest. Deep, hollow emptiness between my ribs.

I need to get the hell out of here. Get to her before anyone tries to stop me.

I get up, unbuckling Oswald. Next, I relieve him of his clothes. Hoodie, jeans, and shoes replace my jumpsuit and slip-ons.

Thankfully, his black hoodie hides the blood splatter.

I’m almost ready.

Almost.

The day is fading fast. Darkness settles over the forest, the road, the skies.

They’ll come looking for me in less than an hour.

I should be headed out.

Except two things are missing.

Two things that were stolen from me.

A quick search beneath the driver’s seat and I find Dick’s backpack. I look inside, and what’s left of my heart warms at the sight. My mask is there. On top of it is her photo.

Beautiful, sad Shiloh. Those blue eyes, so serious, so big and deep as they stare at her dad’s backyard. Pinched, puffy lips I’ve jerked off to so many times.

It’s criminal that they haven’t been around my cock yet.

I’m hard all over again, knowing she’ll be the first person to blow me. The first woman I’ll fuck.

My days of being a virgin are about to be over.

Sex never interested me before I got that photo of Shiloh. An eighteen-year-old Shiloh. Since then, it’s been constantly on my mind.

I want to hurt her.

Go balls deep inside her.

Own her.

I will.

Mask on. Photo inside my jeans pocket. Hood up and over my head.

Dick’s wrist is next. I grab it with one hand. Hold on to his middle finger with the other.

Twist. Pull. Twist. Twist. Pull.

It’s amazing how fragile the human body is. How effortless it is to tear off a person’s finger. There and gone.

I shove it into the pocket of my hoodie.

Fall leaves scrunch beneath my boots as I start the walk back home.

Ready or not, little sister.

I’m coming for you.

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2

SHILOH

For the past eleven years, I've lived with the biggest hole in my heart. A hole that's grown blacker and more painful with every passing October.

Objectively speaking, it's the most beautiful month of the year. The world changes before my eyes. Green turns to gold. The dark of the evening arrives earlier each day. The glow of each street lamp outside my window is a comforting beacon.

Beautiful.

And lonely.

So lonely.

I thought that returning to Seattle after years of living in LA would change that. That being physically closer to Kaleb would make me feel better about this time of year. That it'd be worth blackmailing my father to let me come back here finally.

Yes, I did that. After over a decade of being cast outside of my hometown, I had enough. I gathered enough strength to stand up to him. To threaten him back. I reminded him there were freelance reporters out there who would be drooling to hear all about our violent little family.

No one knows the truth behind what happened to our family. How my father used his money and influence to hide my attack.

How it drove Kaleb into taking matters into his own hands.

"I bet they'd love to hear all about it. Maybe the major outlets will listen, too. Maybe they'll go behind their editors' backs and discuss it on

one of the major podcasts out there. You never know," I told him.

His hands clenched at his sides. His face turned a darker shade of red. Nevertheless, he scrolled his name on the dotted line next to mine.

That same night, during the last summer break, before I started my master's degree this year, I also tried bargaining for Kaleb's freedom.

Dad laughed at me. Then he called a couple of judges and one politician to prove his point. They told him it was out of their hands.

My arms wrap around my middle, the wind chilling my bones. I'm standing on the balcony of my new apartment on the first floor, gazing out at the quiet neighborhood.

It's way colder inside. Where it's just me, my laptop, and my textbooks. Where it's so quiet that all I can think of is him.

I'd go outside. The short walk to the main street would do me wonders. I'd see people. There would be distractions everywhere.

I wouldn't. I hardly ever do. Here, I'm protected. Hidden in this cozy apartment where I spend most of my days. So far, I've gone out with my two remaining friends once. Grocery shopping. Driving to campus.

I don't visit my dad and Kaleb's mom. After I signed the contract, Dad was done with me. Done being embarrassed whenever my name was mentioned in the tech conferences he attends. By anyone who still remembers that Kaleb and I were ever alive.

Kaleb. I never go to see him, either. He isn't allowed to have visitors.

Even if he were, I don't know if I would've been brave enough to go there.

Every time I think of my murderous stepbrother, I can't help the shiver running up my spine. Heat and emotions I can't wrap my head around swarm through me at the mention of his name.

The breeze grazes my cheeks, and I rub them. I turn to the end table on my balcony, pick up my coffee, hugging the mug between my palms.

That first sip scorches my throat.

It should warm me.

It doesn't. Neither does the white wool sweater and the thick black leggings I'm wearing.

My soul is frozen. Irreparably so. The day they dragged Kaleb out of the courtroom changed everything for me.

My chest tightens at the memory. It was this month, eleven years ago, that they took away the one person I ever loved from me.

The man I haven’t seen in so long. Who I still care for. Who I need in a dangerous, twisted way like no stepsister ever should.

I haven’t felt this connection to anyone before or ever since.

As wrong as it is.

He’s a murderer. If he ever gets out of the psychiatric hospital, he could kill me.

Every part of me craves him. Every part of me mourns the loss of having him in my life.

Some days, it hurts to want him this badly. Days like today.

I don’t understand it. I’ve been questioning my attachment to him for years.

Having a bachelor’s degree in psychology and throwing myself into my master’s studies hasn’t offered any explanations.

I would’ve gone to therapy, except the system failed me before. The system let those two kids go despite calling what they had done to me *assault*.

No. One day, when I’ve studied enough, when I’ve learned from the best, I’ll understand why I am the way I am.

Kaleb’s face flashes before my eyes. The adult version of him that I’ve made up in my head. It barges into my consciousness unannounced, raising the hairs on the back of my neck.

His harsh golden eyes. How his jaw ticked that morning in the courthouse. His lips set in a tight line.

Full-body shivers rack through me, tightening my throat.

Fucking Octobers.

They remind me of the month that Kaleb was taken from me. It was the month after the two boys from school assaulted me.

The sound of the lock clicking on the school’s bathroom’s door had me crying out in terror.

I pressed myself against the wall. Put as much distance as I could between them and me.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Lee was the bigger of the two.

The one the girls in my class would whisper about whenever he walked down the hall. In my eyes, the blond boy was as ugly as they come. It was his eyes. Brown and cruel.

He crowded my space. There was no escaping him.

“We’re going to have fun, the three of us.” Connor, the one who secured the door, sauntered closer.

He stood shoulder to shoulder with Lee. Shorter and skinnier than him. As he scratched his head, dandruff flakes fell from his curly brown hair. They dotted the front of his navy school uniform shirt and his striped tie.

I would’ve been disgusted if my heart hadn’t been racing a million miles a minute.

They’d been giving me strange looks for weeks. Since the school year started. Two sets of brown eyes that had been following me around wherever I went.

No place seemed to be safe from them, even in our private school, where they had cameras everywhere.

Almost everywhere. Not inside the bathrooms.

I’d been avoiding these two as much as I could.

That day, I failed.

They got me.

And it was up to me to stop them.

“No.” I raised my hands, balling them into fists. Imagining I was as big and strong as Kaleb. For the past four months since my stepbrother had been living with us, he did that whenever Daddy started screaming or was about to slap me. “Stop. Go away.”

Warmth surged through me as I thought of what Kaleb would say if he saw me right now. He would be so proud of me for standing up for myself.

He hardly ever talked, but I knew he would’ve wanted me to beat them up. To not be scared or call someone for help.

Me.

I was going to make Kaleb so *proud.*

“No chance in hell.” Lee slammed his hand on the wall next to my head. “We’re done chasing you.”

My uniform shirt was buttoned up all the way to the top. My blue blazer was open, but it hid most of my chest. His dirty eyes were on me, anyway. On my breasts that grew over the summer. I hated that.

It was like he could see right through my clothes.

It felt icky. It felt wrong.

“Fuck you.” I gathered every bit of strength I had left. Despite being shorter than the two boys—five-foot-two, same as today—inside my head, I

was taller. Leaner. Meaner. I was Kaleb with his broad shoulders and serious scowl. With his mask on. "Fuck both of you. Let me go."

I said the bad word and I didn't care.

"No," both of them said.

I punched Lee's stomach first. He laughed while Connor reached for my hair and tugged. Hard.

Lee gripped the front of my shirt, and I grunted in pain. He pulled on it, ripping the buttons off. I'd never forget the sound they made as they landed on the floor.

Clink.

Clink.

Clink.

"Stop it," I kept growling, kept fighting—kicking Connor's shin. He had his hand on my left breast, no matter what I did. Lee had his on the right one, yanking the cup of my bra down. Exposing me to them. But I still fought. Still needed to make Kaleb proud of me. "Stop, don't touch me."

"Fuck, they're huge." The pain from having Connor squeeze my breast was unbearable.

"Pink nipples." Lee twisted mine, and though I clawed at his wrist, though I made him bleed, he wouldn't let go. Pain and humiliation burned my skin. It made it red, itchy. My lungs felt too big for my body.

At eleven years old, I hardly knew what porn was. What I knew was that I didn't want any part of it. Not if it made your stomach sink like that. If it made your heart ache and had tears leaking from your eyes.

"G-go away." I kicked Lee since he hurt me worse. Didn't make any difference. "Go—"

The word got swallowed because Connor tricked me. I wasn't paying as much attention to him and he used it against me. Leaned in and bit me through my bra.

His hand on my throat. Choking me.

This is how I die. Choked and bitten and—

My train of thought got cut abruptly when Lee mimicked his friend. Two sets of teeth clamping on my breasts. Two mouths sucking. One hand curled around my throat, another on my navel, going down, down, down.

As much as I wished for it, I wasn't Kaleb.

But I wasn't going to die there.

“Help!” Blood trickled from both of my breasts. Fear gripped my heart and wouldn’t let go. Black. Black dots clouded my vision. I couldn’t afford to faint in that bathroom, alone with them. “Help me! Help me! Help me!”

I was lucky that day. Extremely fortunate that the hall monitor walked past the bathroom and heard my cries for help before either of the boys slammed a hand on my mouth to silence me.

Less so in the aftermath.

The boys claimed I’d asked for it. Threatened the hall monitor that if he told anyone, their wealthy daddies would have him fired and no other school would hire him. I was too shocked to confront him and say that my dad was probably the strongest one of them all.

The hall monitor sighed, took one last look at me, then escorted me to the school secretary. He said I’d fallen and needed a new shirt. I couldn’t accuse him of lying. Couldn’t talk the whole time we were there.

Then I came home.

To Kaleb. He stood in the foyer, same as he’d done on any other day before and after our summer break. While his mom spent hours sleeping in her bedroom.

Tall and dark and menacing. His white mask in place. Black eyes staring back at me.

He cared for his mask. He did. Yet at the sight of my crumpled uniform that was a size too small for me, with my mouth twisted in pain, he dropped it to the floor like it meant nothing to him.

He ran over to me like I meant everything.

“Shiloh.” The first tear slipped out. I couldn’t hold it back a second longer. Rage flashed in his eyes as it trickled down my cheek. His hands gripped my shoulders. “Who did this to you?”

He didn’t know what they’d done. He didn’t need to hear my story. Didn’t ask for proof. It didn’t matter that their parents were rich and could cause him trouble.

He wasn’t the hall monitor.

He was my big stepbrother.

He saw through my pain.

He believed me without an explanation. Without words.

Relief crashed over me. I clung to his waist and cried my eyes out, soaking his shirt.

For as long as I needed him, Kaleb hugged me.

He wouldn’t let go, waited out my tears. Made me tell him everything.

Then, the boy who hardly spoke to anyone picked up the phone. He called the cops first, my dad second. He was my voice when I was too shocked and hurt to say a word.

Only him.

That September was awful. The following October was a nightmare I can’t seem to recover from.

Kaleb being hauled out of the courthouse to the psychiatric hospital. Me being threatened into silence by my dad. Locked up in my own version of prison, in a boarding school where my calls and letters were monitored. I wasn’t allowed to contact Kaleb.

I was scared of what he’d write back to me if I did. If his letters would detail all the ways he wanted to kill me for being an ungrateful brat.

Guilt and fear wash over me. I don’t force them back. I deserve them.

Because when I graduated high school at eighteen, I wasn’t any stronger against my all-powerful father.

Brainwashed. Threatened.

On some level, I still am. I’m still not sure why I’ve been determined to move back here, closer to him.

To Kaleb.

Goosebumps prickle across my skin.

Maybe Dad isn’t wrong. Maybe I’d been living in the same house as a ruthless murderer.

We spent hours and hours in his room. While he wore his mask.

That should’ve been a red flag.

At eleven, it wasn’t.

But no matter how much thinking about him evokes fear in me, a part of me still cherishes and misses him.

A murderer who has me longing for him.

My hand goes to my throat, massaging the strained muscles. Forcing air inside.

Why am I even thinking about all of this?

My abusers are dead.

Kaleb isn’t getting out. The head psychiatrist has been reporting back to Dad for years, saying precisely that. He hasn’t shown any sign of remorse. He isn’t cooperating in group meetings. He barely talks to his doctor.

I shouldn’t even want to be here, so close to the boogeyman.

But I do.

In my darkest, loneliest moments, I've been thinking of him. How he could've hurt me and didn't.

That maybe he would've, had I done the wrong thing. Like he killed Lee and Connor for hurting me. If I'd hurt him, he could've taken his anger out on *me*.

Shaking my head, I go back inside my home. Where it's warm. Safe. I'll have to focus on my studies, then I won't think of anything and anyone.

I slide the glass door shut behind me, padding on my socks across the living room. Past the white couches and the glass coffee table.

My footsteps are silent on the oak wood floors, then the patterned white rug, as I make my way to the kitchen. The cupboards are just as white as the rug, the couches, and the marble countertop.

White, the color of his mask.

Dad hated my obsession with him. The endless questions.

When will he be back? Are you sure he would've hurt me too? I miss him, Daddy. I know it's wrong, and I don't understand it. Help me. Help him. Please, Daddy. Help us.

He wouldn't.

Instead of helping, I was beaten up during the fall, spring, and summer breaks I spent at home.

No more.

Just when I set my mug in the dishwasher, my phone rings. I screech and hate myself for it. For being jittery.

"Everything's fine," I tell myself. "Your head is a mess as always. That's all there is to it."

My phone flashes from the coffee table, the name on it relaxing my tense muscles altogether.

Val, one of my two remaining friends from when I lived here.

The few video calls with her and Marina were my last tether to this place.

I appreciated Val for trying. I respected Marina for joining our calls, even though I could tell she never liked me. I was demonized at my old school, blamed for the two kids' deaths. I also understood why I wasn't her favorite person.

"Hey, Val." Emotionally drained, I drop onto the couch. My classes ended at noon today, but this month has been exhausting. And it's not even

nine. “What’s up?”

“Hey, um…” For a long, tense beat, she’s silent. “I take it you haven’t watched the news today.”

She isn’t asking. She isn’t saying it, either.

She’s whispering. Her voice trembles. It never does that.

Instantly, I’m on high alert, my spine straightening.

I hate the news. Hate everything about it. My stepbrother’s face was splashed on every channel before Dad contacted the press and killed every report on us a day after.

He runs a tech empire, holds patents in multiple fields. He’s always on the lookout for new companies to acquire, and his connections run deep. He’s everywhere.

Before he managed to do it, they put Kaleb’s photo next to mine. They called us freaks. Monsters.

“I’ve been…” My hand trembles as I reach for the remote. I don’t grab it. Can’t. “I’ve been catching up on reading school material.”

“You’ll need to watch it. In a minute.” Val sucks in a long breath. I imagine she’s at home, her hand brushing through her long blonde strands. Her green eyes must be blinking rapidly. She does that when she’s nervous.

My hand closes into a tight fist, nails digging into my palm. My eyes are on the three deadbolts on my door. Locked. I locked them when I came home. Checked they’re set in place three times.

“In a minute?” A thought crosses my mind. If something terrible happened, wouldn’t Dad call me? Probably not. He hasn’t so much as messaged me since I blackmailed him last summer. I shouldn’t be surprised that he doesn’t care if I live or die anymore. “What’s going on?”

“Fuck,” she hisses. “Fuck. Okay. There’s no easy way to say it, so I’m just going to come out with—”

Without my permission, my hand closes around the remote. The television is on before Val completes her sentence.

My heart stops at what’s on the news ticker.

The manhunt for the dangerous killer continues.

Kaleb’s face fills the screen. It appears to be a recent photograph. He looks so…grown up.

Empty golden eyes. Hair cut shorter than I remember. His cheekbones are more pronounced, his jaw sharper.

He’s staring into the camera.

He’s staring straight at *me*.

A punch to the chest—that’s what it is, leaving me breathless.

The air is sucked from my lungs. My hand flies to my throat. Shock and terror sink their claws into me, choking me.

It’s more than that, isn’t it?

He’s beautiful. Heart-stoppingly gorgeous.

A man.

Better than anything I could’ve imagined.

My thighs clench. My cheeks burn. If he were here, would I run away? Or would I lean in and kiss him? Let him touch me the way no other man has?

I’m just as fucked up as I’ve always been, aren’t I?

Jesus.

Fuck.

Val talks and talks. Begs me to turn off the TV. I hear her. I don’t listen to her; instead, I turn the volume up.

“…police reports confirm that Kaleb Blackwood has escaped from Berkshire Psychiatric Hospital.” The brown-haired broadcaster in the blue suit remains stern and unfazed while my world goes up in flames. “What was meant to be a one-hour round trip turned into something out of a horror movie.”

Val’s raising her voice, asking if I’m okay. If I need her to come over, I think.

Can’t be sure. Blood roars in my ears. I’m struggling to make sense of what the broadcaster is saying.

Murdered guard and driver.

Dangerous.

Suspected to be wearing a black hoodie and jeans that were stolen from the driver.

Do not approach him. Call the state police hotline immediately.

The number rolls on the bottom of the screen. White on red.

My breath comes out in shallow, wheezing gasps.

“Shiloh? Hello? I’m coming over, I swear.”

“No.” I’m a ball of fear. Of need and want. “Don’t.”

I didn’t—*couldn’t* expect this reaction. Couldn’t imagine my blood would run hot, then cold, then hot again. I want to run to him. Want to but stay away. Curse him. Punch him.

He scares me and I've missed him, and I don't ever want him near me, ever again.

"What do you mean, no?" Heels click on the marble in Val's penthouse. Her parents bought her one of the prettiest ones in the city. Unlike my father, they love having their daughter around. "I'm not asking, I'm telling you. I'm coming."

"I'm fine."

He's dangerous and insane, Shiloh. Dad's voice booms inside my head. *He'll kill you or any of us for no reason whatsoever. You're a fool for caring about him. Such a disappointment.*

I didn't fully believe Dad back then. Kaleb killed the two boys who hurt me for a reason.

The guard and driver, though, did nothing to earn this.

I gulp in air. Blink.

Maybe Dad was right.

Maybe he escaped so he could take his revenge on me.

Maybe I deserve it.

I definitely deserve it.

I might even want it.

Acid burns my stomach at the idea. I'm sick. Terribly sick.

"You better open the door when I get there.

"I'm really okay." I press the button, turning off the television. The screen goes black. As black as my heart. As black as my soul—one that feels everything and nothing at all. "A little shaken, that's all." *Liar*. "Otherwise, I'm fine. I think I'll take a sleeping pill and go to bed."

Kaleb's mom has plenty of those. She never noticed one or ten were missing. Her golden eyes are constantly empty. Being Dad's source of adoration and personal rag doll has turned her into a lifeless creature.

Kaleb's eyes, however, are usually empty for no reason whatsoever.

Unless he's looking at you.

"I can be there in thirty minutes."

My phone vibrates. An unknown number flashes on my screen. Since it's not my dad's, it must be reporters.

Why hasn't he called? The psychiatric hospital's manager must have called him by now. He's probably busy doing damage control, shutting this down before the story leaks to tomorrow's morning news.

If that doesn’t work—though I’m sure it will—he’ll have his lawyers calling me soon. Telling me how to repeat the words *no comment*.

He’ll add security detail to his mansion, I imagine. Keep himself safe while leaving me here to die.

Kaleb would be doing him a huge favor if he kills me.

I’d be six feet under. Kaleb would be locked away, another news article that Dad would bury.

Honestly, he might be doing me a favor too.

My stepbrother would bring a cleaver to my flesh. Run the tip along my skin.

Blood would trickle up. A little at first.

Then a lot of it. And I’d watch his golden eyes as he slowly kills me. I’d get off on it. I’d come when he rips my heart out of my chest.

I’d know I had paid for my sins against him.

“Don’t. Tell Marina I’m okay.” The pressure between my legs is too intense to ignore. I need this call to end. Need to go to my closet, where I keep the most valuable item I own. That’s where I’m headed. “We’ll talk in the morning. They’ll catch him by then.”

“Yes. Yes, of course they will.” She isn’t convinced. Neither of us are. “Call me if you need me?”

“I will.” *Won’t.*

I’ve only ever needed one person.

And that person is a murderer.

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3

SHILOH

I end the call and set the phone on silent mode.

To hell with Dad's lawyers. The news. The entire world. I leave the useless device on the bed and walk into my closet.

Where I hide my secret. The one I've managed to keep from Dad for over a decade.

I swore to him that I threw Kaleb's mask away.

I'm a horrible liar. I stutter and flush. My words come out jumbled.

But I refused to get rid of it. Couldn't bear the thought of losing Kaleb for good.

I did what I had to. I imagined Kaleb's mask in the dumpster and told Dad I threw it out. For a second, I thought he wouldn't believe me. Dad was quiet, then he relented. He couldn't go through my stuff when I was at boarding school. Sending someone to do it for him would mean a scandal.

That's how I got to hold on to it.

Rising on my tiptoes, I stretch out my hand. Swipe it once over the top shelf, deeper.

Got it.

My secret shoebox. Greedily, I grab it with both hands and bring it down.

My heart swoops as I look at it. Butterflies assault my stomach.

My panties are wet, and the lid is still closed. I don't have to see it for the emotions to rise.

I’m holding on to a memory of a man who used to be my friend. A man who might be on his way to kill me.

Wanting him is a risk.

He could actually show up here, and who knows? I might welcome him into my home.

He could hurt me, then.

Kill me as payback for not standing up for him.

Fearing him turns me on even more. My body is begging for things that would horrify most people.

The smart, sensible thing would be to throw the mask away. It’s not right, the way it’s making me feel. For my stepbrother. A murderer.

So wrong.

I tear off the lid and toss it aside.

A sliver of light from the window filters into my bedroom and closet, illuminating Kaleb’s second face.

White latex. Black eye holes that let him see without being seen.

Rough brown hair that’s nothing like his. My stepbrother’s hair was always cut short. Always perfectly messy.

Maybe that was why he liked the mask. So he could appear as flawed and damaged as he must’ve felt.

I know I could use one. I’m damaged. A horrible, deplorable person.

The reason he’d been locked up.

Me.

“Kaleb.” I drop to my knees, setting the box aside. The mask is in my hands, and now it’s just me and him.

The heat between my legs can’t mean anything good. This isn’t right. It makes no sense, my physical reaction to his mask.

His mask.

This isn’t a meltdown. Isn’t a panic attack.

This is longing. This is pain.

This is a sick kind of love no one should ever feel. Not for their stepbrother. Not for a murderer. Not for a man they haven’t talked to in eleven years.

It is what it is. A vile desire.

This is hell.

I slide the closet door shut.

The texture of the latex in my hands is comforting, though it really shouldn't be.

It takes the edge off. Air filters into my lungs. I need more. I need to be protected. Sheltered.

I need to be his.

This temptation has to go away. The throbbing between my thighs needs to stop.

Impossible.

With each passing second, the buzzing in my body grows. Multiplies.

I close my eyes, imagining him. Blank, black eyes stare at me. Heated ones. Tempting ones.

I'm not that far gone that I think Kaleb's here in spirit. I'm fully aware that my obsession with him is triggering me to feel his presence, regardless.

He's the boogeyman, true.

He's also the kid I called my brother. The reason I was excited to come home every day.

He's a man. A really hot one. I've never met anyone as terrifying as he is. No one's brought up these emotions in me.

My fingers squeeze the mask, thumbs rubbing the coarse material. I raise it until it's at eye level with me.

I'm panting as I draw it closer to my face. The lips are inches from mine, and my pussy is soaked, my nipples tightening. Electricity pulses through me, one painful, humiliating current after the other.

No, Kaleb isn't there.

But I do feel him. I do.

My savior.

Sick, my father's voice taunts.

My stepbrother, I answer.

Murderer. He's escaped, and he'll kill you next.

The only person who ever believed me.

Psychopath.

Don't care.

He's been occupying my mind for hours, days, months. I tried resisting it. Tried shaming myself for falling for my stepbrother, who had blood on his hands. Who hasn't shown an ounce of remorse for what he's done.

He tore out the hearts of the kids who molested me. He killed the innocent guard and driver.

That ought to snuff out any hint of desire I might've had for him.

Unfortunately, feelings don't work that way.

For years, I've thought of him as more than my stepbrother. I've craved him.

I pull the mask closer to my face. Open my eyes.

There are still a couple of inches separating us.

I lower myself to the floor, taking him with me.

Pretending he's here.

Kaleb seemed bigger in the picture they had on the news. Broader. He must be taller, too. To put his face to mine, he'd have to bend to kiss me. I'd be so small next to him.

He's here, my twisted mind tells me.

Then it does more than that.

His mask changes in my grip. An invisible face stretching it from the inside.

High cheekbones and a square jawline push against the aging material. The mask is warm to the touch.

Heat rushes up my neck as my mind dives deeper into my fantasy. Resisting it is as useless as it's ever been.

I want him here. Confined within my dream world where he won't hurt me. Or, he'll hurt me until he rids me of all the guilt that's been eating me alive for years.

My jaw goes slack. My lips part. In my mind's eye, the lips on the mask do the same. They part for me. Invite me.

No, not inviting. Ordering me to press mine to them.

There'll be hell to pay if you deny me. It's a hushed warning. It's as loud as if he were actually here. *You'll deserve it, too, little sister. I'll take my sweet time carving your heart out of your chest.*

I imagine all the pain he could inflict, and I have to bite my cheek to stifle a moan. I'm mortified. Humiliated.

Doesn't change the fact that my body craves him. I lean into the mask at the same time I crush it to my mouth.

Lips on lips. A moan I can't hold back anymore slips past mine.

My eyes close, giving in to the moment.

Logically, I know the mask isn't responding to my movements. I know there's no one behind it.

I give it—to him—everything I have just the same.

This is my reality. This kiss. This desire. I surrender to him, darting my tongue out to swipe along the seam of his lips.

A sting on my bottom lip. It's him. He'd bite me. He *is* biting me, right here, right now.

Sharp, imaginary teeth sink into my flesh and, fuck, I'm soaked.

The closet is too small. My clothes are too tight. Shame, guilt, and my feral needs make a heady concoction.

Let me taste you.

My eyes snap open at the command, staring into the darkness.

Normally, this is as far as my twisted mind would go. I kiss him when I'm lonely. That's it. A kiss.

But—

Let me taste you.

It's louder the second time around. Rough and commanding in my head. Thunder cracking in the skies. A hand wrapped around my throat.

"T-taste what?"

It doesn't escape me that I'm talking to a mask.

I've been spiraling for eleven years, and it's getting worse. Fast.

Maybe once I finish my master's, I'll have the right tools to handle *this*. The craving. The way my sanity slips as I let these moments consume me.

Today, I'm helpless to fight it. The tide is sweeping me away. Pulling me under.

Your pussy. Let me taste your pussy.

I whimper, my hands trembling.

Now.

"Okay."

Good girl.

Some lines can't be uncrossed.

Some actions can never be justified.

Lying down and pulling my jeans and panties down while I hang onto Kaleb's mask is something I can never come back from.

That's it. You're doing so well. Take it all off for me.

Cool air grazes my naked core, and I gasp. My heels dig into the floor.

A pause. This is it. My last attempt to put an end to this debauchery.

Have no doubt, I'll find you, Shiloh. I'll punish you for making me wait tonight. For holding back on me. You'll be begging for mercy, and I'll remind you of this moment. What a brat you've been. I'll remind you how

you wouldn’t let me eat your cunt in painful, cruel ways. You’ll be screaming by the time I’m done with you.

What is this voice? My imagination?

Is any of it really him?

Why am I soaking, dreading, and needing it?

There’s no explanation. It’s a waste of time searching for it now.

I’ll look into this later. At another time, when the dirty talk, fear, and desire aren’t creating a dangerous cocktail in my head.

My knees drop to the sides.

His mask is right there, over my pussy.

Fuck, yes. You smell so sweet. So mine.

Guilt claws at my chest. I don’t have the right to drag Kaleb into this fantasy. No right whatsoever. I haven’t done a single thing to save him.

I could blame my father’s reign of terror, but truthfully, it’s all on me.

If it weren’t for me, Kaleb would’ve never gotten locked up in the first place.

Kaleb, the real man instead of the one I fantasize about, must resent me. For getting him into this mess in the first place. For years of radio silence.

I should ask him for forgiveness. Offer him my life in exchange for his.

When I see him. If ever.

Never mind. Not now.

This, here, is a different version of Kaleb. This is about desire. About sex. About the person I’ve been secretly saving myself for.

In my head, our connection is undeniable. An unstoppable force.

It’s an attraction that began a few years after he was incarcerated. Maybe I’m drawn to the danger. Maybe I need this one person, this one man who stood up for me.

Whatever the reason is, it happened. Admiration turned to lust.

I want him.

And here, in my closet, he’s looking at me like the woman I am.

Whether the real Kaleb will keep me alive after, I can’t be sure.

Not like it matters.

My hands move on their own, pressing the lips of the mask to my pussy.

A wave of pleasure crashes into me, so strong that my head thrashes to the side, my back arching. My breaths are ragged, shaky.

“Fuck,” I groan. The contact. The friction.

The feel of him. He’s the first man to kiss me there.

I’m submitting to him, to Kaleb. Holy fuck. I can’t stop grinding my hips toward him. Can’t silence the sounds I’m making.

This is real. This is very, very real.

You think I’m done? Hell no. Fuck my face harder, little sister. I want your taste on my tongue for weeks.

I curse and moan as I rub the mask over my pussy. Not missing a spot, I roll it from my entrance and up. Slowly. Tentatively. Like God Himself might strike me for giving in to my impulses.

I’m your God here. Harder, Shiloh. Faster. Or do you want me to choke the life out of you for being bad?

The last of my inhibitions snaps as I do as the voice says. His voice.

I press the mask tighter to my pussy, rubbing it against the wettest parts of me.

The nose and lips stroke my clit over and over, driving me closer to the edge. Building my orgasm. I hear Kaleb’s groans as if he were down there, between my thighs. Licking, biting, sucking.

I don’t know if he’s had any sexual experience. I don’t know if he’s ever thought about me like I think of him.

What I do know is that this version of Kaleb is devoted to me and no one else. He is, and he—*fuck*—eats me out just the right way. Just how I’d like it.

With him, I wouldn’t feel shame or pain. I’d feel his tongue on my lips and—*my God, that tip of his nose on me*—his fingers on my body.

I’d feel him.

A few more strokes and it’s like my brain explodes. I push the mask into me, hard, as I lift my hips and ride it. Riding out my orgasm that has my toes curling, and my mind going numb.

“Kaleb. Kaleb. Kaleb,” I chant his name. The name of my God.

But good things never last, do they?

No, they don’t. Not for me.

When my orgasm simmers, the closet is as empty as ever. Lonely. Cold.

As if they never left, fear and guilt crash into me.

Burdened by shame, I get up, peeking into my room from the closet. The empty bedroom.

He isn’t here. Of course he isn’t.

Doesn’t mean he couldn’t be. Later tonight, he could show up here. Hurt me. Kill me. I won’t blame him.

My chest tightens. My stomach dips.

It isn’t safe for me to go out there. I can’t make myself leave the closet to clean the evidence of my orgasm from my thighs and wipe it off the mask.

I can’t leave it dirty, either.

Sliding the door closed, I take a deep breath. Bring the mask close to my face. I lick off my orgasm, taking my time as I swipe my tongue all over it.

A second orgasm builds inside me, and I hate myself for getting turned on by this.

I’m distraught, that’s what I am. I won’t blame myself for making love to a mask. For falling for my stepbrother.

No matter how wrong it is.

Not tonight.

I keep going, doing my best to remove any evidence of my depravity, then pull my panties back on.

In another life, we could be good together. Could be happy.

In another life, where nothing bad ever happens.

There, I’m never conflicted about my feelings. There, I don’t go to bed each night, fearing the boogeyman and what he might do to me. In that place, I don’t crave it.

Unfortunately, I’m here. Alone and scared.

I hug the mask to my chest. Pinch my eyes closed, lie on my side, and curl into a ball.

A few deep breaths, and my brain finally, blissfully, shuts down.

Tomorrow will be better.

Tomorrow, I’ll be stronger. I won’t feel any of this.

Hopefully, with Kaleb far, far away from here.

As much as I want him, as much as I need to confront this fear, he can’t be here.

Truthfully, I don’t care whether he kills me or not.

I care about him.

He can’t risk getting caught again.

After years of wrongful imprisonment, Kaleb Leo Blackwood deserves to be free.

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4

KALEB

Crazy. Volatile. Violent.

A murderer.

My mother always knew what I was. Shiloh's dad called me that and more to my face. The few idiots who waited for me outside the courthouse were equally creative.

Not Dr. Reynolds. He calls me *interesting*.

His special mask-wearing patient. My blatant lack of remorse for killing two innocents.

Or so the rest of the world had believed before Shiloh's dad swept the story under the rug.

Why wouldn't they? No charges were ever pressed against the kids who assaulted Shiloh. NDAs were signed, preventing everyone involved from ever speaking about it. The two boys and my stepsister were dismissed.

Imagine my wrath. At Shiloh's dad. At the kids who made her feel so small. So insignificant.

After two weeks of the so-called *investigation*, the charges were dropped.

Boys will be boys.

Her dad would've paid for it with his life if I'd had more time. If I hadn't been focused on killing her attackers first and watching after her every other waking minute.

Until the police arrived, she cried herself to sleep every night. She clung to me at home and couldn't stop looking over her shoulder.

She needed me. And I let her dad live. Temporarily.

Anyway.

Calling those kids innocents? What a load of crap.

As soon as Shiloh stepped into the house with her red-rimmed eyes. With her tormented gaze.

When the first tear slipped.

I knew.

Who did this to you?

Going about it the right way failed her. Us. I believed, foolishly, that I could be a better person for her.

Another reason I went to the authorities first? She deserved to see that the system wasn't entirely fucked. That the motherfucking hall monitor was an anomaly.

Yeah, right. The system was every bit as rotten as it had been during the years my dad beat the shit out of me.

Avenging her had been my sole purpose ever since. I couldn't rest until I'd taken care of them.

I wasn't crazy. I was determined.

The same determination grips me now.

It's what has gotten me here, to her neighborhood.

I memorized her address, along with Jerome's number, before I chewed up and swallowed the note he slipped me.

I got here after snapping a man's neck and stealing his car to get to her.

In my defense, he should've known better. *No good deed goes unpunished.* Who pulls over to pick up a huge man wearing a mask, anyway?

The random dead man on the side of the road, that's who.

Enough of him.

This is about me and her.

The girl who's haunted my dreams throughout the years.

The lights are off in her apartment, but she's there. I feel her heart beating inside it. Hear her soul calling to mine.

I look around her street before I walk up to her building. If there's one thing I learned from my past, it's this: I can do whatever the fuck I want, as long as I don't get caught.

The street is quiet. It's late enough that everyone's home, sleeping.

Except this guy. A man sitting in the bushes across from her building. Sleeping.

Sleeping means he isn't a reporter. The fact that he's alone and hiding in the bushes instead of waiting in a nondescript car means he isn't a cop, either.

Plus, Shiloh's dad silenced the news about my escape. During the first hour of my ride here, they talked about me on the radio.

One hour, that's it.

No one's supposed to be here from either the press or the cops.

Which leaves me with one option.

Shiloh's controlling father didn't leave anything to chance. He had someone sent here to make sure Shiloh doesn't stir shit.

A private investigator.

A snoozing moron.

I stuff my hands in my jeans pockets, tilting my head.

With no money and nowhere to stay, I should go house hunting. Kill another person or two so I could have a place to lay low while I stalk her.

Her home won't do, obviously.

Hmm.

I really should get going.

Impossible.

My lungs expand as I suck in a deep breath. Air filters in through the holes in my mask. Same air she's been breathing since this summer.

At the thought, at the notion, I come alive.

A temporary home for myself can wait.

Every cell of my body demands I go to her.

I'm throbbing in my jeans. My heart slams against my ribs. I relish the thought of inflicting harm. Of hurting her. Taking her.

It's been that way for the past four years.

This incessant need to have my little sister who hasn't written to me. Naked. Crying. Coming with my name on her lips.

A pressure builds behind my temples.

Patience.

I really, really should get out of here.

Not before I leave her a gift, though.

Dick's finger.

Yup.

It’s as good an excuse as any to climb into her apartment.

Guessing her door must be barricaded from the inside—a result of living with a monster, no doubt—I go to her balcony.

I bend my knees and hop.

Easy. My hands cling to the railing. My abs and biceps engage as I lift one foot onto the balcony and then the other.

After some maneuvering, I’m up there, crossing my arms over my chest.

Taking a step closer, I look into her dark apartment.

No shadows dance around in the living room.

She’s asleep, as I suspected.

But I feel her. It’s stronger here. Her emotions. Her hurt and pain and fear. So strong I taste them on my tongue.

That’s how powerful our connection is. The invisible bond that’s tied us to each other since day one.

Of course I fucking feel her.

Not bothering to adjust my painful hard-on, I slide the glass door open and step inside. Silently, I move through the living room and head straight to the open door to my left.

Her bedroom.

Except she isn’t in her bed. The sheets are made. Shiloh isn’t lying beneath them.

I wasn’t wrong about her being here. Her phone is on the bed.

She must be here somewhere.

Before I go looking for her, I pick up the device.

Hmm. An insight into her life. Can’t pass that up.

A single swipe of my thumb on her unlocked phone grants me entrance into her world. A few notifications flash on the screen. Messages and missed phone calls. Someone left a voice message.

The first text is from her dad, listed by his name, Ronan Talbot.

I know he’s out, Shiloh. Don’t you dare embarrass me. There’ll be consequences.

Delete.

He’s done hurting her.

I’m here. I’ll be the one to hurt her. Pleasure her. Protect her.

Next in line is a phone call from an unknown number. The one right after that is her voicemail. I delete the missed call and listen to the recorded

message.

“Hello, Miss Talbot. This is Dr. Reynolds. Your stepbrother’s psychiatrist. From Berkshire. I have a good reason to suspect that your stepbrother might be—”

Delete.

In fact, why leave her any of these notifications?

The world has nothing to offer her.

Only me.

Delete. Delete. Delete.

Now that that’s out of the way…

Come out, come out wherever you are.

Inhaling the sweet air in the room, I catch a whiff of her scent.

Her closet. She’s there.

The door doesn’t make a sound as I slide it open.

Moonlight filters into the bedroom, spilling into the closet. And I see her.

Fucking adorable, thinking she could hide in there.

There’s no hiding from me.

My Shiloh is curled into a ball on the floor. Her full brown hair is the same length as it was when I was taken away. Her expression is as angelic, as innocent, as sad as it looked in the most recent photo I have of her.

Trailing my gaze over her body has my heart pumping. She’s soft, curvy. I want to wrap her bare legs around my neck. Bury my fingers into her generous hips. Run them along her waist. Under her sweater. Under her bra, if she’s wearing any.

The need to take my mask off and bite her soft flesh is insistent. It almost takes over.

But then I see what she’s hugging to her chest.

A mask. My mask. The mask I’d worn for years. The one she brought to the courtroom.

I’d recognize it anywhere.

She’s had it with her. All these years.

She missed me.

By the looks of it, she’s been afraid of me too. Otherwise, why sleep here?

So many secrets. So many things to catch up on, little sister.

Fuck, she’s perfect. A tiny ball of fear, waiting for me.

I bet she got wet when she heard the news of my escape. I bet her sweet pussy clenched on air, hoping I'd get to her.

There'll be time.

Time to spread her legs and lick her. Time to take her virginity while giving her mine. Because of course she's a virgin. She had to have saved herself for me.

Time to hurt her for years of shutting me out of her life.

Her gift first.

Dick's finger. I came here to drop it off. I should. Drop it here and leave.

Except look at her. Fuck. Look. At. Her.

After four years of jerking off to her photos, I feel cheated on.

None of them have ever made me feel this.

Being in her presence hits different. My desire has a chokehold on me. I haven't even touched myself and I'm already the hardest that I've ever been.

Images of her crying and screaming and begging me to stop are poisoning my head. They make me steer off the plan.

My dick is in my hand before I have a second to think about it. Thumb rubbing my precum on the barbell.

A groan reverberates in my chest, but I suppress it. I choke on it. It's a fucking hardship, staying silent. It's agony to keep my need bottled up inside as I squeeze my dick and pump.

My abs are tight with need. My throat locks.

Shiloh's lips part in her sleep and there's nothing—absolutely *nothing*—I want more than to stuff my fat cock between them.

Violating her mouth is all I can think of. It can't be stopped, this fire. This urge to fuck her throat. Watch her eyes snap open when I'm gripping her chin and sinking every inch of my dick deep into her mouth.

The horror I'd see in those blue oceans. The sheer terror in them.

Jesus, I need to have her. But no, I won't rush this.

She won't wake up if I drop to my knees. If I come close to her.

Need that.

My towering shadow blocks out most of the moonlight. I'm no less tempted by her when she's bathed in darkness.

I lean on the nearest wall and jerk off to her.

"D-don't kill me," she mumbles in her sleep.

Talking to me.

My cock jumps in my hand.

I'm her stepbrother. Her ex-savior. Her current boogeyman.

A nightmare that protects and haunts her.

Her daddy must've fed her lies about me while I'd been locked up. Has to be why she hasn't written.

Too bad it's backfired on him. Terrifying her gets me off like no fucking other.

She would've screamed if she had woken up to this. Me, looming over her, seeking pleasure by pumping my dick. She would've scrambled away from me at the sight of my thick crown and the gleaming barbell.

You're a perfect little thing, Shiloh. I'll have so much fun defiling you. Destroying you.

The thought of ruining her for any other man sends me over the edge. God. Fuck. I lean over Shi to shoot my orgasm on her innocent face.

I empty myself on her cheeks, her lips. On her hair. My hips rock into my hand until I'm spent. Until I'm done.

Until I'm able to breathe again and tuck myself back inside my jeans.

For a few more seconds, I watch her through the dark holes in my mask. My girl is dirty. Filthy with my cum on her and my mask in her arms.

Mine.

You've earned your gift, I mouth as I place Dick's finger next to my old mask and leave.

I won't be gone for long.

Out here, in the darkness of the night, I realize I can't spend the night in another bed.

No.

I'll be back under hers.

When I find a temporary home, I will.

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5

KALEB

Shiloh's scent and the picture of her cum-streaked face are fresh in my mind when I pick the lock on Davis' door. I know it's their apartment because they have a sign on their door.

Not like the name of whoever lives here matters. The choice to make this apartment my home is strictly strategic.

It overlooks Shiloh's apartment. First floor. Corner unit.

A place to lie low while Shiloh and I get reacquainted again. As adults, this time around.

They have what I need, and I'm taking it.

Remorse? Guilt?

What the fuck are those, anyway?

The bobby pins I grabbed from Shiloh's bathroom work in unison. The pins inside the lock turn.

I press my ear to the door. No one's running toward it. No one's up. No one can stop me.

A strange emotion rises to the surface. A smidge of compassion, maybe? For their kids. If they have any. Hopefully not.

I hate the idea of killing random children for no reason whatsoever, but this is my home now. Once I'm inside, I'm going to kill this entire family. There will be no witnesses left. No evidence of my crime.

See, eleven years ago, I made the mistake of leaving a scene without covering my tracks. Getting Shiloh the revenge she was owed had me

seeing red. Terrorizing the boys who'd hurt her, then ripping hearts out fucked with my sense of self-preservation.

When I was done, I dropped their hearts to the floor. Went home and gave Shiloh their fingers. I was satisfied that justice had been served.

Stupid.

I've learned my lesson.

No one in this apartment is getting out alive.

Click.

The lock gives in.

I'm greeted by no one, not even the static light of the TV. The living room is quiet. Dark.

That's my cue to go inside and close the door behind me.

"Fuck me," a woman moans, stopping me in my tracks. At the sound of her voice, I freeze and listen carefully. "Harder. Fucking harder."

Okay then.

There are only two people I'm going to have to murder. Who happen to be fucking.

I'm not jealous of them for being together. For having something I couldn't.

Not fucking jealous at all.

My mask clings to my skin. It's as if it's trying to become one with me.

It is a part of me.

In two steps, I'm in their kitchen, grabbing the biggest knife they own from one of the drawers.

The opposite bedroom is my second stop. Thankfully—again, I'd really hate to kill kids—it's a storage room. Books and notebooks are stacked one on top of the other. Three dressers line one of the walls, clothes bursting out of them.

What a mess.

Not my problem.

The couple in the other room is.

I swing their door open and there they are. A sweaty, hairy man is on top of the woman, rocking his slim hips into her. He huffs and puffs, his biceps bulging with the effort.

Up and down. Up and down.

Nothing about this scene is a turn-on. I stand and watch, anyway. Maybe this is what Shiloh would like?

“I’m close, yes.” It’s the woman again, her voice as fake as they come. I guess that’s a no to my question. I will absolutely not fuck Shiloh like that.

Also, *you’re welcome, lady. Seems I’ll be doing you a favor.*

Another “fuck me harder” follows.

Sounds like *your limp dick will never make me come* from where I’m standing.

I’d spank Shiloh raw if she pulled that fake shit on me.

I wouldn’t stop until she screamed and cried in agony until she came all over my cock.

“Going to come. Can’t wait, you’re taking forever.”

Couldn’t be any more seductive if he tried.

“I’m close, I’m telling you.”

“I’m closer.” Apparently, he didn’t feel like he hit rock bottom before. “Come, or you can finish yourself off in the shower.”

I’ve had enough of this. I’m bored out of my mind, and besides, this woman deserves better.

God, or whoever’s up there, will ensure she gets it in the afterlife.

Or they won’t.

Don’t give a fuck either way.

Back to my task.

They’re oblivious. Clueless.

Have no fucking clue that I’m approaching.

The couple says nothing when I walk around the bed, standing at its edge.

He keeps hopping on her.

Would you look at that, a real-life jackhammer. A soon-to-be-dead one.

I’m quiet as I raise the knife. Quieter still when I shove it into his back as far as it’ll go.

His scream comes first.

The woman follows right behind.

I pull the knife out and a river of blood rains down on her.

And what does Mr. Heartthrob do?

He staggers off her, then off the bed.

You’d think his priority would be to help her. To shield her.

Not this guy.

He’s backing up toward the door, dick swinging, one hand pressed to the hole I made in his back. He bleeds out, despite his best efforts to cover

the bleeding gash.

The woman lunges at me. She's far braver than he is, naked and reaching for my knife.

Like hell.

Her blonde hair is greasy, almost slipping from my grip. I yank on it while she screams, granting her a quick death by slashing her throat open.

The other people I killed had it coming. The torture. The pain.

She doesn't. Not like I'll lose any sleep over this.

Her hands flail. Blood sputters out of her mouth.

It lasts for ten seconds before her body gives up. The exact time it takes Mr. Davis to snap out of his shock.

He has one foot out the door.

Flop. The slab of meat that was once Mrs. Davis bounces on the bed.

"I don't want to die, please," he mumbles, his voice as weak as he is. "Help. Help. Somebody, help me."

Me.

Me, me, me.

As if the death of this woman he was fucking means nothing to him.

For me, Shiloh always came first. Since day one.

"Don't you dare touch her!" I never raised my voice. Hardly ever spoke.

But when Shiloh's dad would charge into her room to let off steam by slapping her, you bet I fucking shouted.

"I'll discipline my daughter however I please, freak—err, Kaleb."

He knew disrespecting me was a hard line for my mother. She was grateful for what I'd done before we moved here. It hadn't been for her. It saved her useless ass, regardless.

And since Shiloh's dad had a thing for fucking my mom or parading the beautiful woman like a showhorse, he tried to be civil around me. When she was within earshot, that is.

"No, you won't."

He looked at my mask the same as the rest of them did. Everyone other than Shiloh. "I won't have to put up with you forever."

He'd put up with me.

It was me who wouldn't put up with him. No one got to hurt my little sister. No one.

“Kaleb.” A small, shaking hand rested on my elbow. “It’s okay. You can leave. I’m fine.”

Leave her here? With our unfinished puzzle? With him?

To hear his hand cracking on her cheek from the other room?

“Fuck no.”

He would usually storm out after he saw I wasn’t backing down. Once the door closed, I’d order her to keep doing what she was doing, then spend the night on the floor.

By her bed.

Her personal bodyguard.

Unlike Mr. Davis.

“Is it money you’re after?” His body shakes harder the closer I get. “Take my wallet. Take my credit cards. They’re on the counter. Please.”

Six feet separate us.

“Sex? Y-you can rape me. Fine. I won’t put up a fight. But let me live.”

There’s only one person I want to fuck and it sure as hell isn’t him.

“D-don’t come any closer.”

Three feet.

Two.

None.

“I won’t tell!” he shrieks the moment my knife lands in his jugular. His fingers clutch my wrist. “I won’t.”

No, he won’t.

I drag the knife down his chest. Gut him like a fish while I think of Shiloh.

How I need to protect her. How I need to save her.

To keep his guts inside, I stop right below his chest. Guts are fucking messy. It’s enough that I’ll have to scrub his blood off the floor.

“H-h-h-help.” The final plea is murmured as the light in his green eyes dies out.

His body flops in a heap on the floor. His head is twisted at an awkward angle. The knife sticks out of the gashing wound.

Time to clean up.

Thankfully, the couple owned two large rugs. I go to the living room to get them, then snoop around their home. The duct tape, gloves, and two sets of twenty-pound weights—those he obviously never used—will have to do.

Next, my ride. The couple's car keys are nearby, on the counter next to his wallet. The license plate number was written on the key chain. Strange that people still do that, begging to have their car jacked.

Oh, well.

I flip through his wallet. Their IDs say their names were Elron and Ginger Davis. Useless information.

What's important is that everything I need to transfer them to the pier is here. Their final resting place will be at the bottom of the sea.

They might float later, but by then, Shiloh and I will be long gone. Either that, or they'll be unidentifiable.

To ensure this, I burn off their fingertips with a lighter. Bash their teeth and faces in.

Then I go through the laptop in their living room. His are the only work emails I find. Elron is a store manager.

And this store manager just quit his job. Oh, my. He's been diagnosed with a terminal illness. He'll spend his final months at home, by his wife's side. Please respect his privacy and refrain from visiting. Thanks, bye.

Another quick search through the apartment reveals that the wife isn't employed. No work tag or uniforms mean no one will come looking for her.

Roll, roll, roll into the rugs the Davis couple goes.

Fitting them into their silver Chevy Impala takes some maneuvering, but I make do.

The sun will rise soon. No time to waste. I push the pedal to the floor, reach the pier, and scan for a spot where there are no security cameras. It's there that I haul both bodies to the water, dumping them into the sea.

With Elron's wallet in my back pocket and their apartment all to myself, I'm done with my chores for the night.

I need to be around her.

I guess calling Jerome will just have to wait.

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6

SHILOH

The alarm on my phone is obnoxiously loud. I'm a heavy sleeper, which is why I set it up that way.

This morning it isn't as ear-piercing. Strange.

I wake up to the sound of it, anyway, as dull as it is. Blink my eyes open, staring into the darkness of my closet. At the small square of light between the sliding door and the wall.

Sun seeps through the crack. The day has arrived, stripping the remnants of sleep from me.

Shame creeps up my neck once I've fully woken up. I remember everything from last night. Every small, debauched detail of it.

But I don't remember my lips being sticky. My cheeks are, too. I keep gripping Kaleb's mask with one hand as the other rises to my face.

Weird. It's like touching dried glue.

Oh. Oh.

This stickiness, it's me. I made a mess while licking the mask clean, so yeah, it has to be my arousal I feel on my face.

The warmth in my neck turns into a scorching, burning wildfire as realization sinks in. I pinch my eyes shut, willing the humiliation away. I'm never doing that again. Ever.

I blame it on yesterday. My emotions were all over the place. That's why I let it go that far.

No more.

The alarm blares and blares.

“I’m up.” I place Kaleb’s mask in the shoebox. Bury it in the back of the closet, on the upper shelf.

Where it belongs. Away from someone like me. Someone who isn’t worthy of him.

As much as I wish we could be together. As much as the idea has my blood searing in my veins.

He’d be better off without me. The traitor.

By now, he’s either managed to cross the border into another country. Or he got caught.

Either way, he isn’t coming for me.

Not to fuck me. Not to kill me.

I have nothing to worry about or get excited about. No big stepbrother to long for.

With a heavy heart, I slide the closet door open a tiny crack, my head bowed in shame. But as the light filters in, I see it. Oh, shit. Oh, no.

No, no, no.

This isn’t real.

This isn’t. Fucking. Real.

A finger.

He was here. The only man who would’ve left this for me.

“Kaleb.” My fingertips press to my parted lips.

My eyes slam shut, my brain working hard to erase it from my memory.

“I’m imagining it. He couldn’t have gotten in here. No way. I’m being paranoid, which is reasonable, right? I’m still confused. Still riled up after thinking he was going to kill me last night. My mind needs to make sense of this, so yeah. It conjured a finger. A finger that isn’t there. I’m not next. I won’t die today. Won’t get a chance to fall to my knees and”—I whisper that last part—“beg for his forgiveness. Or die, as much as I’ve earned it. He isn’t here. He isn’t here.”

Taking a deep breath, I open my eyes.

Shit.

The finger is still there, exactly where it was.

Right. There.

A million emotions fight for dominance inside me. Lust, fear, and rage climb one on top of the other. They’re crowding my chest. Cracking my ribs.

Heat rushes through me. I’m cold down to my bones a second later.

What should I do?

Is he here?

Is this a message? What kind of message?

Deep breath.

This is a threat.

My penance for fucking up royally.

He saved me, and I did nothing for him in return.

I square my shoulders, straightening my spine. I won't run from him if he wants to kill me. Won't cower from my fate. My punishment.

My death.

I owe him that much.

Since the finger is here, I imagine he's out there. Waiting for me. A cleaver in his right hand. His left one is ready to tear my heart out of my chest.

A curse escapes me, at how wet the image gets me. How excited.

This is wrong.

I run my fingers through my hair, smoothing it.

That's how I know I'm sick beyond repair.

This moment is important to me.

The first impression he'll have of me after years of being apart.

I don't want to look like the kid he remembers. The one he'd see first thing in the morning as he'd rise from the floor next to my bed. The girl who had bedridden hair. Puffy eyes.

I want to look like a woman.

Even if he slits my throat a second later.

I want…I want…

I might not survive him, but damn it, I want him to think I make a beautiful corpse. I want his living, free heart to skip a beat as he watches the blood soaking the floor beneath me.

Just one heartbeat.

A crazed laugh bubbles up from within me. I slap a hand over my mouth, shutting myself the hell up.

I'm not—

I won't—

I have this.

Whatever comes, I have this.

I'm not scared. I asked for it.

In a rare act of courage, I forced my father’s hand to let me come back here. I asked to be close to Kaleb.

Now that I have what I wanted, I can’t lose my shit.

Dying won’t be the worst thing I’ve ever had to go through.

My fingers curl around the door’s side, and I slide it open. Gray light shines into my eyes. I squint, searching for Kaleb in my room.

No one’s here.

No formidable man taking up the entire space of my bedroom. No cleaver wielded in a big hand. No one hauling me out of the closet, towards my would-be killer.

I’m alone, and yet the strange feeling intensifies. A lasso cinching around my midsection, dragging me forward. The pull is strong. Undeniable.

Where is he?

The phone’s alarm has stopped ringing. It’ll start over in a few minutes. I go over to the bed and turn it off. Sneaking a glance out of my bedroom and then the rest of my empty apartment.

It’s possible that he left. That this is just part of a mind game, a different form of revenge.

He isn’t here to tell me what the finger means. What this silence means.

He has plans for me. Cruel ones. Painful ones.

Later. I’ll take his punishment piece by piece when he makes himself known.

Until then, I have to get ready for the day.

The pit of my stomach is covered in lead as I head back to my closet and pick the finger off the floor. I carry it to the kitchen, storing it in the same ice pack where the other two, smaller ones, rest. The gifts Kaleb gave me forever ago.

In another lifetime.

I sigh, treading back into my bedroom and from there, my bathroom. My nose scrunches, picking up a clean scent.

He showered here.

The lead at the bottom of my stomach weighs me down further. I grab the doorframe, fighting to stay upright. Fighting to catch my breath.

What else did he do while I was out of it?

Did he stand there, listening to me fucking his mask?

My reflection stares back at me from the vanity mirror. My wide eyes. Pale complexion. Slack jaw. I thought I was ready for what he had planned for me.

Laughable. Look at me. Hyperventilating. A mess.

I have to get out of here. Need to get outside, get some fresh air. Rearrange my thoughts.

But first, shower. I can't show up to school looking like I'm two steps away from a meltdown.

Ten minutes later, I'm wrapped in a towel, crossing the room.

Rushing toward my closet.

"Little sister." A hand wraps around my ankle.

My eyes cut to the floor. My mouth opens, but no sound comes out.

Kaleb's here.

His lean forearm flexes. The rest of his body is hidden under the bed.

My scream is a choked breath that's lodged in my throat. Air refuses to go in or out.

Lungs burning.

"Come here." Kaleb isn't patient as he pulls harder on my ankle. He's vicious. Throws me off balance.

With a yelp, I drop to my hands and knees, the rug absorbing my fall.

On heavy limbs, I crawl forward. Away from him.

In my periphery, I catch him climbing out and, foolishly, I stop to turn my head and look.

His face is hidden behind the mask. A new one. An identical one to the one they made him leave behind, but a lot less worn out.

This is a nightmare. This is a dream.

I'm going to die.

Frozen in place, I'm paralyzed as he's staring at me.

I was right. He's bigger than he was when they locked him up. Shoulders broader. He's a lot taller than I remembered him, too.

Even through his hoodie, I see that his body has filled out. He's lean and terrifying. He could do some real damage.

He will.

And I'm stuck in place.

His hand moves to wrap around my wrist, hauling me to sit up on my knees, a position that mirrors his. I stare up at him, too shocked to say a damn thing.

Please. Stop. Let me go. Kill me.

Nothing comes out.

Kaleb's actions speak for both of us. His thumb strokes my pulse point. His grip is punishing. His touch is a threat.

I can stop your heart from beating whenever I choose.

Though every part of me screams *yes*, the primal need to survive makes me whisper, "No. No."

"Hmm." That sound is more than what most people get from Kaleb. It does nothing to comfort me. He doesn't love me.

Judgment day is here.

Kaleb gets to his feet, pulling me up with him.

We're both standing, yes. But we aren't equals. Oh, no. He's much taller. Bigger. And his jeans and hoodie smell of my laundry detergent.

Guessing it right—that he spent the night here—doesn't feel like I won anything. It means he's been stalking me. A predator who gets off on the chase. Who's about to eat his prey alive.

He's waited for me to wake up so he could take his time torturing me.

Murdering me.

I whimper. He cocks his head to the side.

My teeth snap shut.

"Missed me?" he grunts.

An old instinct flares inside me, obliterating my need to live. A protective one. *Of him*.

Someone could come searching for him here. In my apartment.

"This is a mistake, coming to my home." As I talk, I clutch the knot on my towel, tugging it close to my body. "You have to hide."

He isn't listening to me. Kaleb tips his chin down, his entire focus on my hand. On the flimsy towel that separates us. Ice chills my spine and heat pools at my core.

His eyes strip me.

He's doing deplorable things to me inside his head.

No doubt about that. I don't need to actually see his eyes or be a mind reader to know it.

A low growl reverberates from his chest.

A weak cry comes from mine.

Not because I hate it.

I don’t hate him being here. Don’t hate him staring at me in a totally different way than how he did eleven years ago.

I do not, cannot, hate how his free hand bunches my towel up my legs. Just a little.

I cry out because I don’t hate it at all.

“Please.” *Stop. Go on. Kill me. Just kill me already, please. I need this nightmare that I’ve lived in for the past eleven years to end. Do it.* “Please.”

His hand stills on my thigh. “You haven’t answered my question. Don’t you dare *please* me until you do.”

“I did miss you.” It’s the truth. My chin wobbles as he pushes my towel up another inch. “I did, and I’m so sorry, Kaleb.”

He stills a second time. His thumb is there, pushing between my clenched thighs. If he goes any higher, he’ll touch me where I’m hot for him. Where I’m shamefully wet for him.

For a murderer.

For my stepbrother.

“What about you? Hmm?” Sassing him isn’t an act of bravery. It’s all panic laced with surprise. So much so that I gasp at the end of the sentence.

He huffs a cold, soulless laugh. “What about me?”

“Yes.” My mouth does the talking for me. Instead of telling him to leave like I should, instead of letting him punish me, I demand answers. I’m going to die soon, anyway. Might as well find out if there’s only hate there or something else. “Did you miss me?”

He’s on me in a flash. Manhandles me to the floor, pressing my back flat against it. Towering over me while my wet hair sprawls on the rug. On my shoulders, hiding my scar. My shame.

He can’t see it. Can’t pity me.

Though his pity isn’t my biggest concern. The fear of the promised pain is stronger than I imagined it would be. I clutch onto my towel for dear life, terrified of what could happen once it’s off.

Desperate for it.

What’s wrong with me?

“No, I didn’t.” He bats my hand away, tugging at the knot on my towel.

It opens, revealing my skin to him. This is bad. This is wrong, how he won’t let me close the towel. How he pushes my legs apart.

“Didn’t miss you one fucking bit, Shiloh.”

“Stop.” Tears well in my eyes. He isn’t letting go. His cock is hard against my thigh. I know what comes next.

This can’t be my first time. With a man who loathes me. Who wants to kill me.

No matter how much I idolize him. Want him. Wet for him. I’m indebted to him, but now that he’s here, now that the threat is real, I can’t.

I’d rather die a virgin.

I’d rather he end it quickly.

If he had missed me, it would have been a different story. He hadn’t, that much is obvious.

“Why should I?” Kaleb runs two fingers along my pussy, drawing wetness up to my clit.

“Stop.” But I arch my back to him. Lift my ass in the air, offering myself to him.

“Answer me.” His voice is firm, his fingers sliding up and down my pussy.

Through the fear and desire, I notice that his touch is tentative. Rubbing me slowly. He shoves his fingers between my lips and circles my clit, picking up the pace when my breath catches.

He’s looking for my pleasure points.

I gulp.

He’s going to force it on me.

The man who so clearly despises me.

He’s going to use my pleasure to humiliate me.

“Stop, stop.” I was ready to die. To be punished for what I’d done to him. For never speaking up. I can’t deserve *this*. To be mortified and hot and panting for him. “Stop, please. I don’t want it if you hate me. Kill me. Chop off my finger. Just stop it.”

My hand on his wrist is useless. He yanks it away effortlessly. Glares at me through those black, dark eyes of his mask.

“You’re soaked, Shi.” He lifts his hand, and the evidence is there. My endless pleas for him to stop prove to be a lie. “Give me one good reason why I should believe you.”

“This can’t be my first time.” A tremble courses through me. My answer has to be wrong. A punishment follows it when two of his thick fingers are shoved inside me. Stretching me. Curling inside me and—“Oh *God*.” I clench my teeth against the onslaught of desire. “I’d rather die.”

He’s watching me. His gaze roams over my body and face while I moan and writhe and cling to the rug. It’s wrong and fucked up, and I truly shouldn’t want this. Even if my body is singing a different tune.

Even if my pussy feels full and empty at the same time.

“Liar.” He curls his fingers again, rubbing my walls. My reactions—he’s repeating it because he’s seen me react to this.

My stepbrother is an observer. He’s learned, in a few minutes, how to manipulate me through his touch. He hasn’t had any experience with it, I realize, as he starts circling my clit with his thumb again. Doing what coaxed moans out of me.

He’s studying me.

But this is his first time, too.

“You’re my stepbrother.” I clench my thighs. Fuck, it feels so good. Fuck, his fingers are deeper, his thumb goes faster, and fuck, fuck, *fuck*. “I owe you my life. For ruining yours.”

“Poor, rich girl.” He raises the bottom of his mask. There it is, the hint of his perfect lips. His sculpted chin. “You think I need anything from you?”

“I—I—” Yes. No. Maybe. “Please. Please. Stop this. Stop, Kaleb, I’m begging you. It can’t feel good. I can’t want it when you hate me. But yes, I owe—”

Can’t finish a sentence. Can’t catch my breath. The pads of his fingers are demanding an orgasm from me. It’s building in my stomach. I’m trying to cling to my sanity. To the part of me that knows how wrong this is.

We can’t be together. Never. Too much has happened.

And on top of that, he’s my stepbrother.

“Your life? No, thanks. Don’t need it.” He sits up, spitting on my pussy. His thumb flicks on my clit, and I wish I could scream. Wish I wouldn’t care about him being caught. I do. I do. “Your cunt, though?”

When he presses his fingers harder, dragging them in and out of me, I nearly black out. He’s pleasuring me and I won’t give in to him. Won’t let him have my orgasm.

Just tell me you don’t hate me.

“Your cunt wants it.”

“No.” My vision blurs around the edges. That need, I’ve never felt anything close to this. This tidal wave that consumes everything in its wake. “Please, let me go, Kaleb. Kill me instead. Kill. Me.”

“Let’s get one thing straight.” The third finger he adds is the death of me. I’m stretched and full. He pushes deeper, and there’s pressure there. Like he’s going to break through a barrier. “I didn’t murder those two losers because I had nothing better to do that day. Everything I’ve ever done, I did it for you. Only you. So no. I’m not here to kill you. But I have been feeling a little neglected. And this virgin pussy is so fucking pretty. I want it. I want all of you, but I’m taking this part first. So you’re going to start by apologizing to me. By being a good whore and opening your legs for your stepbrother.”

My lungs are about to explode. I’m holding on to my orgasm and it hurts. It hurts worse when he says things that make my toes curl. Looking into his mask makes me hotter. It’s depraved and fucked-up and I’m so turned on.

It’s agony.

“Look at you,” he groans. “Tight and clenching around me. When I decide—”

I whimper in pain, cutting him off mid-sentence. It’s impossible to hold on to a nuclear bomb. It’s torture. It’ll be humiliating when I let go.

“When *I* decide to take your cunt.” He won’t listen. Won’t stop. Just like he didn’t when I reminded him we were stepsiblings. When I said I didn’t want this. “You’ll feel so good around my cock. Squeeze out of every drop of my cum.”

The worst and best thing happens then, at his filthy words. With his fingers invading me. His thumb that flicks and rubs and demands my orgasm.

I come, shuddering around his fingers. The bones in my body melt for him. My skin is set on fire. The intense, unrelenting pleasure pushes moans out of me. Feral ones, ones that an animal would make.

That’s how good it feels. How decadent and wrong and terribly consuming.

“Kaleb, stop. I can’t take it anymore.”

When I think it can’t hurt any worse, that it can’t get any better, it does. Another spit on my pussy and I almost tear my rug beneath my fingers. It’s wrong that his mask makes me want things. It’s wrong that it’s his hate that drives him to do these things to me.

“Go on.” There’s an edge to his voice. It’s rugged. Raw. “Tell me how much you hate this. Tell me how you can’t stand it. I dare you to. While

your pussy sucks my fingers in.”

“Please, I don’t want it when you’re like this.” My denial is quieter. Pathetic. He might kill me once he milks me for all I’m worth. “We shouldn’t be doing this. I told you. I can pay you back with my life.”

He makes a noise in the back of his throat. No time to analyze what it means. No time to escape when Kaleb moves on top of me.

He’s a force, taking both my wrists and locking them together with one hand. He’s merciless as he shoves them up and over my head.

“You don’t want this, huh?”

“We can’t. Not when you hate me.” Such a futile denial. A miserable one, since I don’t put up a single ounce of a fight. “Wrong. So wrong.”

“Is that so?” His hard cock is pinned to where I’m wet and sensitive. I can feel how big he is through his jeans. His free hand closes on my breast. A punishing grip. A sensual one. “Then why are you ruining my jeans? Why”—he rolls his hips, a jerky movement that sends another aftershock rippling through me—“you keep coming on my cock?”

“You don’t want this. You hate me.” I pause. “Don’t you?”

One shake of his head while he dry-humps me. He’s brutal and his jeans graze my pussy in a painful way. A commanding way.

“I thought I was clear before.” He grunts, rolling my nipple between his fingers. When I moan for him, he groans again and thrusts harder into me. “This is what I want. I want to hurt you. Want to take from you. Your pussy. Your moans. Your orgasms. Your cries of pain. This is who I am. I’ve waited for you for years. Watched you grow up from the sidelines. Jerked off to your pictures.”

“Kaleb.” It’s a half-cry, half-question.

“Yes, of course I fucking I lied. Of course I missed you. And I’ll do whatever the fuck I please with you. You won’t have a say about it. You’re going to stay alive for every second of it.”

This is too much. Knowing he sent people to stalk me. That he’s been planning this. I can’t process anything anymore while he invades me like this. While he won’t listen to me when I tell him to stop.

I’m done. I give up, letting myself just *feel*. I let myself want him without thinking about right and wrong or the consequences of his revenge.

His hate is as addictive as the other side of him. The one from our past.

“You’ve been mine from the second I saw you.” His thrusts are faster, pinning me to the floor. I can’t stop opening my legs for him, can’t stop the

second orgasm from building inside me. As scared as I am. Because he moans, and holy fuck, it's beautiful. He moans like a man. Like a beast. "Mine to protect. Mine to *love*. Now…"

His cock thickens in his jeans, and it's then that he tears off his mask.

You can bury a lot of painful shit in the back of your head.

The sting of a slap. The burning of a belt. The humiliation of being assaulted. The helplessness of being ripped from your home.

But these eyes. This vacant yet dark look. The gold swirling inside them.

I could never ever forget that.

He's been the star of too many dreams. So many nightmares.

"Kaleb." I push my arms up, my hands longing to touch him.

He shoves them down, lips twisting into a snarl. "Now you're mine to ruin."

This orgasm is unlike any other. The world is a sphere of white light, heat, and passion. Hate for missing out on him. Fear of what he'll do next.

I'm all of it and none of it at once. Tears streak my cheeks. My temples.

"Fuck. Yes, Shiloh. Fuck, I'm coming." His cock jerks in his jeans and his lips are on mine. Bruising me. Pushing mine open so his teeth have access to my bottom lip, wounding the flesh. Drawing blood. "Keep crying for me, baby. Let me see this. How beautiful you are when I destroy you."

"Why?" I ask between one savage kiss and the other. He comes and curses, and I feel warmth and wetness through his jeans. "Why would you want this?"

"Why." He's looming over me, his breaths slowing. "I'm chaos and destruction. I'm wrath and your own personal hell. And—I'll repeat it until you realize I mean it—this is what I want. You. You could tell the cops. You could have them lock me up again. Doesn't matter. I'll keep coming back. I'll keep taking what's mine, and that's you. It's always been you."

Fear and want and affection suffocate me.

He knows I may never reciprocate his feelings.

He doesn't care.

About anything.

I do.

Whatever we did here is something two stepsiblings should never do. Something that should never happen between a future psychologist and a serial killer.

Between a woman and the man who hates her. Who punishes her simply because he wants to.

“No, it hasn’t.”

“Yes.” He licks my tears from the corner of my eye and down to my ear, where he stays. “Better get used to me, little sister.”

He gets up, snatches his mask, and strolls toward the front door without a care in the world.

I’m left here alone, my world in ruins, my orgasm running down my thighs.

All alone.

Again.

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7

KALEB

Toying with Shiloh wasn't as entertaining as I thought it would be.

Watching her cry and shiver for me was hot. I could've stayed there for hours. Given her all the pleasure she *didn't want*.

But now that I stroll out her door and head out to my new home, my chest tightens.

Missing her brings back the constant pain. The persistent ache from my years at Berkshire. I'd double back, to go to her, except this isn't how this game works.

Besides, I've got shit to do.

I slip into my temporary home, throw my boxers into the washer, and then into the dryer. While I wait, I suck on my fingers, tasting her orgasm on my tongue.

Since I can't keep wearing Elron's clothes, I use his laptop and credit card to order new ones. Gloves, rug, tarp, and weights too. Same-day delivery, of course. Elron is a generous man.

Was.

While I wait, I swipe the apartment clean. Using bleach and opening the windows does wonders to make the stench of death evaporate.

Ding! My boxers are dry.

I put them on and shrug on one of Elron's oversized hoodies. Thankfully, the skinny man had a few of those. I pull on the hood over my head, shove his aviator sunglasses up my nose, and leave toward the convenience store on the main street.

Without my mask.

Can’t draw too much attention to myself.

Shiloh will find out where I live, and no, that’s not going to happen.

The guy at the register doesn’t even look up when I pay for the food and burner phone.

Good for him.

Good for me.

I’m back in my apartment, inhaling the scent of bleach. The stench of blood and death is long gone. A few hours later, my clothes, boots, and work tools are delivered to my doorstep.

I should be satisfied.

I’m not.

Shiloh’s spending her day in college, out of my reach. Dry-humping her this morning has done nothing to satisfy my need for her. It’s been hours that we’ve been apart, and fuck.

I’m starving.

To touch her. To learn everything I can about her.

Who are her professors? Does she have any new friends there? Has anyone asked her out? Tried to touch her?

What’s mine?

My jaw tics. It infuriates me that this information went beyond the scope of my agreement with Jerome.

I’d offered him one kill in return for a batch of three photos, ongoing reports of her whereabouts, and a few other items I’d requested.

When I asked for another deal, for more photos, he said no. Told me I might get caught again once I was out, and he wasn’t taking chances on me. No freeloaders and all that crap.

Makes sense.

Infuriating.

I’ll have to go over to her campus and find out the rest for myself.

I could ask Shiloh, sure.

She might even open up to me. With enough torture, she’d be persuaded to tell me every single thing, just so the pain would stop.

I won’t do that to her.

I’ll save it for when her legs are spread. For when I’m fucking her hard and she’s begging me in that velvety voice of her. *More. Stop. I don’t want this.*

So sweet.

I'll handle that as soon as I contact Jerome.

I pick up the burner from where I left it on the kitchen counter.

Me: *Ready, set, go.*

The response from my friend with bright green eyes comes in quickly.

J: *I heard. Good job, you fucker.*

Me: *Got something for me?*

J: *Yes. I'll contact you soon. Still need that syringe?*

A strange feeling tingles my lips. A tug on the corners of my mouth. I'm not used to this.

Smiling.

It drops as soon as I notice it.

Me: *Yes.*

I text him the address of my new home and put the phone on the counter.

Halloween will be here soon. Technically, nothing's stopping me from walking outside in the evening, wearing my mask.

Maybe I'll do just that.

My brow furrows when the phone buzzes.

J: *P.S. You need to see this. My sources tell me Daddy Talbot paid off the big news outlets to forget his daughter ever existed. Indies, however…*

He attaches a screenshot from an article.

Vigilante and Serial Killer Escaped. Will He and the Girl He Saved Finally Reunite?

That's the headline. The rest is conspiracy theory bullshit, courtesy of Hyatt Holiday, such as no one kills two people to get revenge on a girl he's known for five months.

No one tears their fingers off. No one is this brutal for no good reason.

He must be obsessed with her.

Must have been a pedophile.

Hmm. That part was the one my doctor was the most curious about. Why he'd thrown me in isolation for long periods.

Tell me about Shiloh. Did you ever have inappropriate feelings for her? Tell me. This information remains confidential and won't leave the room. It's a safe space. No, come clean. You won't see the light of day until you admit to the truth.

Eventually, I did. I told him point blank that I never sexualized her, never groomed her. I never hoped she could have been a few years older so I could have touched her.

I could kill people for no reason whatsoever. Pedophilia, though? Fuck. No.

My doctor believed me.

Hyatt, however, firmly believes I'm a pervert. I'll rectify it soon enough. His picture isn't there, but sometimes, all you need is a name.

Some people just have a death wish.

Although manners mean nothing to me, I shoot Jerome a thank you.

The information he provided me is free and valuable. Granted, I'll need Hyatt's address in case he decides to make us his pet project. I'll get on it in the next few days.

He isn't a priority, not yet.

She is.

Mask on.

Lights out.

Shiloh doesn't know it yet, but she's waiting for me.

I won't keep her.

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8

SHILOH

"Where do you think you're going?" Val tugs at my arm playfully. "You can't run from us, lady. We're here to hang out. Together. Don't leave. I'm begging you."

They really are here for me, both her and Marina. They know my class schedule and have waited for me outside the campus.

Both of them look so pretty. They changed out of their work clothes and into cute jeans and soft pastel sweaters. To spend their evening with me.

A person who fucked a mask. Who got off on her stepbrother's fingers. Who begged for him to kill her.

Sick. It's not the clinical term for my condition. I would've never called a patient that, not even in my notes.

But I can't help this feeling that I am unwell. There's something wrong with me.

A chill descends onto my bones, and I shiver. It's been like that all day. Remembering this morning has done that to me.

That's why instead of driving as fast as I could to school in the Range Rover Dad forced on me—*no daughter of mine would be caught using public transportation or a rental*—I walked. I half expected that Kaleb would catch up with me on the way there.

He didn't.

Then he did.

Over the past couple of hours, I've been feeling his eyes on me.

This constant state of anxiety has my bones freezing, has me shaking with fear.

My black wool sweater won't keep me warm. My thick jeans and boots do a crappy job of that as well.

I think I'm just so tired of missing him. Of fearing him. Of losing my goddamn mind.

I need to be alone. Inside my barricaded apartment. I need time to figure this out.

"Another time." The smile on my lips is forced. It won't fool them, so I tap my leather shoulder bag. "Lots of work to get done. Classes are harder than I thought. Val, could you give me a ride home?"

"I'll give you one. Later." Marina twists her brown hair up into a messy bun. She narrows her amber eyes at me. They turn into a shade of bronze at night, under the glow of the streetlight. "You're not going home, and you're not spending the evening alone. We—You need this."

This is the first time she's shown such interest in me.

Which isn't a true interest at all. While the news hasn't mentioned anything about Kaleb today—*thanks, Dad, I guess*—yesterday was a different story.

She must have something to say on the subject. Like how she hates Kaleb. Same as always.

Val, though, doesn't have a mean bone in her body.

"One cup of coffee, swear." She has her long blonde braid pulled to her front, her green eyes kind as she strokes my arm. "Then you can avoid us for another two weeks. What do you say?"

"Please?" Marina comes up on my other side. I prefer she wouldn't get too close, an opinion I keep to myself. "I'm not letting you out of here before we talk."

Playing dumb in hopes she'll drop it, I ask, "Talk about what?"

Her response is nothing but mumbles. A mixture of vowels and consonants that hardly register as a strange feeling takes over me.

The goosebumps spreading over my skin tear me away from the conversation.

No one else seems to notice the change in the air. In me. In the world.

I don't *think* he's here anymore.

I know he is.

I swallow around the lump in my throat. Search the street ahead of me. Study every face. Every tall person in a hoodie who walks around in a slow, menacing gait could be him.

No masked man is coming toward us. No large, dangerous shadow anywhere in sight.

He's here. Has to be here.

He is. And he's looking at me, that's for sure. And this isn't how lovers look at each other. His violence, his aggression, it's suffocating.

And not in a bad way.

He said he wouldn't kill me.

Then again, when we were young, he promised he wouldn't hurt me, either.

He never did.

"…also, you have to be proactive about this. Consider what to do in case he comes for you." Marina raises her voice to be heard over music blasting from one of the cars. "He could ask for your help. You should be ahead of this, Shiloh. Call the police, have them put someone outside your home. They'll protect you from being associated with this criminal."

Her warnings are mere noises again.

The prickling sensation intensifies. There's no rationalizing this. No breathing through it.

My imagination isn't working overtime.

This is one game I'll never win.

I'm the little bug caught in a spider's web. The princess he'll lock up in a tower until the day she dies.

No one will know I'm there. That I'm his.

No one pays attention to my stiffening body, either. I might be surrounded by people, but I'm all alone.

Running won't save me.

Hiding won't help.

He'll catch me.

He'll take what he wants.

I trust that he meant what he said this morning.

Terror twists my guts. My wrists still feel the pressure of his hand on them. My knees are weak.

Val tells Marina, "Maybe going to the police is too much. Maybe he just needs help."

I’m done listening to either of them.

I need to face my fears. My monster.

My savior.

The man who’ll ruin me. The man who, in many ways, already has.

One look over my shoulder, and ice shoots straight up to my head. Down to my toes.

My jaw drops. My heart ceases to function.

He’s really here. Behind me.

Tall and broad and wearing his mask. Hands stuffed in a dark gray hoodie. Legs set in an intimidating stance.

Kaleb affixes his entire attention on me.

Other people would run in the other direction, having undergone such scrutiny. They’d be begging for their lives.

I, on the other hand, say nothing. I refuse to tremble.

He can’t keep terrorizing me and expect me to be okay with it.

I don’t want to be okay with it.

I don’t.

Even though my heart wishes it could unite with him.

Kaleb remains firm in place, his stance wide and steady. Outside my campus. In plain sight, for everyone to see.

And that’s the worst part of all. Not that he touched me. Not that he hates me.

That he’s out here. That he doesn’t take a single precaution.

That he might get caught.

They wouldn’t hesitate to lock him up and throw away the key.

This is too much. Staying here. Staring at him.

Anticipating this agent of chaos’s next move. Expecting the sirens. The cuffs.

I narrow my eyes at him. He makes no move to either hide or attack me.

Maybe if I ignore him, he’ll get bored. The thought sends a million knives slashing through me. The idea of being rejected by him is a painful one. But imagining him locked up will be the end of me.

Regretfully, I return to the conversation. “Listen, thank you for your concern. I just need to get home. Please. We’ll have coffee another day.”

They exchange a look.

At the end of it, Val squeezes my arm. “Sure about that?”

“Yes.” The pressure at the back of my head is gone. The ice has thawed. When I glance behind me, Kaleb’s nowhere to be found. I can’t believe I miss him already. “I just want to go home.”

“Okay, okay.” Marina gestures toward her black Porsche across the street. “I promised I’d give you a ride, and I will.”

“Thank you.” One last hug for Val, and I follow Marina to her car.

When she starts talking again, it’s about her date tonight. She’s done talking about Kaleb, or prying into my life, thankfully. I nod and smile at her. I offer her my attention and encouragement, even though I don’t hear a single word she says.

I’m glad when she drops me off. I run up to my apartment, double-checking each and every lock.

He wants me.

I need him.

But the way he goes about it is all wrong.

“You were a part of my life once, and you’ll learn to be that person again. Or, at the very least, be something less terrible. Less of a boogeyman that was put on this Earth to haunt me,” I whisper to the empty apartment. I beg. I close my fists, slamming my eyes shut. “You have to learn to treat me right, or I’d rather you just kill me. Otherwise, I won’t let you in my life. You aren’t allowed in here until you do that. Until I’m sure you won’t get caught again. I won’t.”

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9

KALEB

The syringe that was delivered to my door before I left the house today is in the pocket of my hoodie. The street I walk into is dark, yet not empty.

People walk past me, ignoring my mask.

They're as inconsequential as the bloodstain I couldn't remove from the Davis's queen-size bed.

Only Shiloh.

The face-off we held earlier had my muscles straining. My teeth ground to the point they might crack.

She looked so beautiful out there. My stepsister. My prey.

Her lips were parted. Her eyes glistened before she squinted them in anger.

I could swear I heard her heart beating. Could feel it as if I had it in my palm.

Impossibly loud. Deafening.

A calling I couldn't answer.

And her goddamn friend is to blame.

Marina. I remember the brown-haired rich bitch. She dropped Shiloh over once when her dad's drivers—the three of them—were down with the flu. Right after I moved in and before the end of the school year.

That day, I looked out the window, hating that I couldn't drive. That I couldn't take her. The staff in the house we lived in locked the garage when

they’d caught me driving one of the many cars Shiloh’s dad had owned out to the driveway. Without a driver’s license.

It was nice of Marina. Resentment seared through my body, regardless.

I had to watch Shiloh climb out of someone else’s Bentley. Someone else had taken care of what was mine.

I can drive just fine now. It’d taken me years to convince Dr. Reynolds to sign off on driving classes and a driver’s license. In exchange, I offered him ten minutes of talking about my abusive, dead father.

“Take me home.” Shiloh does her best to sound brave. Calm.

The syringe practically vibrates in my palm.

The syringe I landed for her. For our games.

After I eliminate the threat.

The girls’ chatter fades as I walk in the opposite direction, moving through the streets and then alleyways to where I parked Elron’s car.

The ride to her home is uneventful. To avoid being detected, I drive through back alleys. The traffic is lighter that way, too, so no wonder I get there before them. Shiloh’s apartment is bathed in darkness.

She’s out there.

My woman and the bitch who doesn’t want me anywhere near her.

Won’t be the first time someone tells her to stay away from me.

“Shiloh, what the hell did I tell you?” her dad bellowed, his voice sharp through the thick walls.

My mother wasn’t there to tell him to shut up. She’d never been there to stick up for her stepdaughter. She’d hide somewhere around the house, pretending to be asleep.

I was there. As soon as the bastard started raising his voice, I tore the door of my bedroom open. I’d been sleeping that night when he came to her room. Only had my sweats and my T-shirt on. No mask. No time to pull it over my head.

Fighting sleep, I moved slower than I would’ve liked.

But I moved.

I’d always haul ass for her.

I’m coming, Shiloh.

“What now?” She sounded strong for an eleven-year-old. Fierce. “What do you want?”

My feet thumped on the carpet.

“Wasting your goddamn time with that freak and his goddamn mask.” When he shouted shit like that about me, I figured Mom wasn’t just hiding. He’d probably given her one of her many sleeping pills. Made her his own version of Sleeping Beauty. Guess she liked it better than getting beat up every other day. *Not like I gave a fuck about her. “Don’t you dare try to deny it. I saw you on the camera app today.”*

The motherfucker had a camera in her room. Should’ve realized it sooner. Controlling psycho.

“He’s not a freak.” At the sound of her tiny roar, I halted in place. It reminded me of Simba from that “Lion King” movie she’d made me sit through a few days ago. “Stop calling him that!”

I was sure I was hearing her wrong.

“But he is!”

“He’s my brother!”

Yes, I heard her perfectly fine. She stood up for me.

When it put her at risk.

When it could cost her.

She screamed at him while I wasn’t there to protect her.

Defending me.

Something that felt a lot like warmth filled my chest. It hurt, that crack in my ribs.

“I’ll call him whatever I please,” he thundered, tearing me out of my trance. Of my awe. “This is my house, and you’ll do well to remember that.”

I swallowed up the distance between us in six large steps.

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!” She had her hands curled into fists by the time I stood at the doorway. A little ball of fire, stomping and baring her teeth. Her blue eyes blazed. This fucking awe swept over me all over again. “He’s not a freak! He’s. My. Brother!”

“The hell he is.” Fucker’s arm raised. Palm open.

He was launching forward to strike her.

I was faster. Meaner. I grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and threw him out of the room. Locked Shiloh and me inside until he quit banging on the door. Until his empty threats about sending me to boarding school simmered into nothing.

Deep down, he loved my mother. Deep down, she knew she owed me.

It’d been her one request entering this marriage. Keep her son under the same roof as her.

A brand-new Porsche pulls up to Shiloh’s building as the memory fades. The most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen climbs out of the passenger side. Her expression is stony as she waves at Marina.

She’s gorgeous. Infuriatingly gorgeous.

Smiles are overrated.

A person’s genuine expression, that’s real. That’s raw.

That’s my wounded, broken Shiloh. The woman I want to tear apart and put back together again. Until my lungs are no more and my bones turn to dust.

Before I do, though…

Marina speeds off, the Porsche’s obnoxious motor roaring in the quiet neighborhood.

I take off after her.

Minutes pass. I keep a three-car distance between us. Trailing her silently through dark streets into a part of the city I’ve never been to.

My brow furrows when she pulls up to the curb in one of the alleys. What the fuck? This rundown neighborhood isn’t anywhere I’d expect Marina to visit.

Ever.

The street lamps flicker. Trash bags overflow the pavement. The stores are closed and barricaded by roller shutters. The city’s surveillance cameras are nowhere to be found.

Out of every squeaky-clean, picture-perfect part of Seattle, she chose to come here.

She really shouldn’t have, but you won’t see me complaining.

The less evidence of what I’m going to do to her, the better.

No one will frame me for this murder.

Then again…Shiloh will figure out I did it.

Her soon-to-be-dead friend’s finger will give me away.

She’ll be upset. Outraged. She’ll accuse me of being a murderer. Of not doing what she said, like hiding. Fuck hiding.

And fuck her. In the literal sense.

My cock jerks at the image of her getting riled up and telling me no.

The fire in her eyes. Her fight. She’ll hate me and curse at me, which will be the perfect fucking moment to shove my dick inside her.

For that to happen, I need to get this show underway. I grab a pair of gloves out of the box I threw in here earlier and shove Elron's Zippo and my new wool hat into my hoodie pocket.

The syringe stays here. That treat isn't meant for Marina.

I'm about to leave, my hand already on the handle.

It stays there.

The reason Marina is here has revealed itself.

A guy about her height jogs out of a building toward her. He wears a green army jacket, gray sweatpants and has a wool hat on.

She gets out of the car when he knocks on her window, throwing herself at him.

Their lips lock. His hands tangle in her hair and her body presses to his.

In no time at all, he flips her over and yanks her jeans down her thighs.

She's smiling into the night, offering him her ass while he pushes his sweats down. He takes what she's giving to him, shoving himself inside her. Pounding her against the car.

This is the second time I kill people while they're in the act.

My hard-on is as good as gone. My dick is as loyal as I am. There's only one woman I want to see naked. Only one woman I want to have above me, beneath me, all the fuck around me. And it's not Marina.

God, I miss Shiloh. She'll cry again when I put the syringe to good use.

Can't wait.

I should've been out of the car by now. Something must be seriously wrong with me, because I consider aborting my mission. To let them fuck each other undisturbed.

I would, except Marina is all about cockblocking me.

Unlike Val, Marina—whose hair is being pulled as we speak—won't let me have my sickening ever after.

I say you should have the police put someone outside your home. They'll arrest him on the spot.

Meddling bitch. She's earned it.

The guy who's going to get caught in the crossfire?

Well, well. Whoever said life is fair was wrong.

Dead fucking wrong.

The new boots I got this morning don't make a sound as I cross the street toward the couple.

The guy flipped Marina's face to the other side while I was watching them. His mouth is in her ear.

They're too absorbed in each other to see me coming.

"Deeper, deeper. Yes, Branden, yes."

"Say my name again, you rich slut." The sounds of flesh slamming into metal echo through the empty street. "Tell Daddy how bad you want his cock."

"Yes, Daddy." The harder he presses her cheek to the car, the louder she gets. "Fucking own me with your cock. Yes. Yes. *Fuuuck*."

He won't be praising her for doing what he said. Won't *own her with his cock*.

Not for lack of wanting.

One of my hands is wrapped around his throat from behind, yanking him back. His dick hangs in the cold Seattle air while I use my free hand to stick a thumb into his eye.

"W-what the fuck," he groans. His body goes numb, the shock sucking the air out of his lungs. Sharp, unexpected pain would do that to a person. "Marina, Mar. Help."

"Branden?" She's breathless, rushing to pull up her jeans.

It's either fear or surprise that keeps her staring forward as I strangle her man. While I squeeze the life out of him.

"Mar." The choked sound barely reaches my own ears. *Pop* and I've invaded his eye socket. Blood soaks my glove. I tilt my hand so it won't reach my hoodie. "Mar."

"I have money." Shakily, she raises her hands.

I don't blame her for taking the cowardly way out. I wouldn't want Shiloh tackling a stranger in the night, either.

"I—Please, I'll give you everything," she screams, tears leaking out of Branden's remaining eye. "I won't even call to report that my credit cards have been stolen. Here. Take this."

A tennis bracelet flies in the air. Diamonds sparkle as they land on dark asphalt.

Fuck her money.

He convulses in my hold. Strains. Three, two, one and bye-bye. Last breath. Curtain call.

Limp. Dead.

The obstacle standing between me and this bitch has officially been eliminated.

“There’s more where that came from.” She shudders hard enough that her teeth knock together. A stark contrast to the woman who strutted around outside Shiloh’s campus, full of herself. “I have the password to my dad’s safe. We’re loaded. I swear. I swear. You can have everything.”

When I hurl her boyfriend to the side, she shrieks. Flinches.

The abrupt movement causes her to look down. Her eyes land on the passenger’s window.

In the dim light of the street, she sees my reflection in it.

I gloat as realization dawns in her eyes, wrapping her hair around my gore-covered gloved hand.

“No! Kaleb!”

Satisfaction rolls through me. She knows I’m the one bashing her head into the car. I’m the one who’s cracking her skull open. Me.

“Stop! Help! Stop! It hurts! Why?”

I can’t be bothered with explanations. She should know by now that she’s a meddling bitch and deserves to die.

“I—” *Cough*. Her lips have turned the color red, glistening with her own blood. “Please.”

Her pleas go unanswered. I’m not the forgiving type. I don’t stop, destroying her face one bashing at a time.

No one comes to her rescue. In this crappy neighborhood, this shit must happen all the time.

At last, Marina lets go and departs this world. The air leaves her lungs in a vapor that sticks to the window for all of a second. I pop open her trunk, throwing her and her boyfriend there.

Oh. Almost forgot about this.

I reach in for her hand. Push her shoulder down. Yank on her finger.

Twist. Twist. Snap.

Another memento for Shiloh. I stuff it into my pocket, set the wool hat on fire, and shove it into the fuel tank.

Bye, bye.

A loud-as-fuck explosion goes off behind me. Heat licks up my back on this otherwise cold night.

In the car, I take a moment to appreciate my creation. Orange and red flames devour the darkness. Smoke coils upward, slithering into the sky.

My job here is done.

But my night isn’t.

SHILOH SLEEPS LIKE THE DEAD.

I know, because I’d spent many nights watching over her.

Tonight, I’m hovering over her bed for a different reason.

I raise my hand over her angelic face, almost touching her. My sweet stepsister. My unsuspecting Shiloh. She hasn’t locked her balcony’s sliding door. Again.

She thought I came in through the door last time. I’m responsible for her misconception. When I walked out that way this morning, I meant to trick her. Apparently, it worked.

The asshole who’s supposed to be keeping tabs on her snores in the bushes, so he hasn’t seen me climbing up her balcony.

Enough about him.

Her. I’m here for her. Fuck, isn’t she adorable. Curled up into a ball in her bed instead of the closet. Clutching onto one of her pillows tonight, instead of my mask.

It has to be her way of telling herself that she doesn’t care that I hurt her. That she truly hates me.

She can lie to herself all she wants. She can keep acting like I forced her this morning.

I’ll drag the truth out of her.

Forcefully. Painfully.

That’s why I’m here, after all. To be this person in her life.

Her nightmare.

After placing Marina’s finger on Shiloh’s nightstand, I pull the covers off her. I’m hard in a second. The moonlight permeates through the window, casting a silvery glow on her half-naked body.

In nothing but a white T-shirt and matching panties, she’s a sight.

My hands ball into fists, clenching and unclenching at my sides. I’m dying to sink my dick inside her. Wake her up with my shadow snuffing out the light around her. My cock soaked in her hymen blood.

A low roar rises in my throat. I lean over and bite the inside of my cheek. Pull back.

Fucking her isn't on the menu tonight.

Gifting her Marina's finger is.

Keeping her guessing. Being scared of me.

That's what I'm here for.

But goddamn it, I want it. Her. Crying. Screaming. Her soaked pussy and to have her begging me for something, anything.

I haven't had any practice before. Never touched anyone else or thought about making them come. But my body, heart, and whatever's left of my soul are so in tune with Shiloh. So connected to her.

I know exactly what she wants, even when she doesn't.

I'll give it to her.

God. Fuck.

This primal need inside me, this hunger, it burns.

Her pretty cunt pulsed around my fingers this morning. I did that to her.

Me.

Every cell in my body aches to have that again.

She said she didn't want it. Didn't want me putting myself at risk.

Fresh anger swirls through me. It gets me hard, resenting her for it. For pushing me away. For thinking I'd be stupid enough to get caught a second time.

My eyes slide over her face. The soft curve of her jaw. Closed eyes.

Slowly, the anger in me is silenced. Gone.

She's done nothing wrong.

But it doesn't mean we're done here. Oh, hell no.

I have to step up our games and my resolve.

Through pain and power, she'll see reason.

In a few days, she'll stop denying me anything.

It'll be hard to say no when she's as addicted to me as I am to her very essence. Once my claws have sunken too deep into her.

This—*me*—is the end of the road for her.

I unbutton my jeans, roll down my zipper. Can't take another second of my painful erection. Can't stay here, at her side, without touching myself.

Fuck. Yes. My eyes roll to the back of my head when I fist myself. I swallow a groan, looking at her. Really focusing on her this time. Her pouty lips. Her hair that rests on the curve of her slender neck.

Her naked legs. I'll have those wrapped around me.

They're smooth. Soft. Unharmed.

I'll have to rectify that last part.

Goddamn you, Shiloh, for making me *feel*.

It's torture, stroking my cock when I'm desperate to shove it down her throat. It's painful as fuck to have my hand squeeze it. I need it to be her lips closing around me. Sucking. Hurting me.

For now, all I have is my hand, so I stroke myself. Going slow, making it painful as I rub from root to tip.

In my fantasy, I have her mouth around me. I'd be the first man she sucked.

I love that she's as inexperienced as I am.

She'd bite or graze her teeth along my length. Precum would trickle down her throat—that's how much I'd welcome the pain. I'd twist my body, would reward her by spitting and circling her clit. I'd do it like I did this morning. I'd get her off. I fucking know it.

While she moaned for me. Cried for me.

The air in the room shifts as the movie in my head changes. I picture myself between her legs. I'd have one of her breasts in my palm, rolling her pink nipple between my fingers.

Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

More precum leaks from the tip. I rub it with my thumb, the friction of the barbell making my balls tighten.

If I could, I'd tear her panties right off her. Use my tongue to study her pleasure points. My cock. My fingers.

Toys. So many of them.

She'd come so many times that she'd drench her sheets. My face. My tongue.

She'd be driven to the brink of insanity. I'd force her to leap off it.

With me.

My chest tightens. My hips thrust into my hand.

She'd say no again, and I'd fuck the defiance out of her.

I'd pump her full of seed. I would. She'd be swollen with my babies.

Mine.

That image of owning her so thoroughly is what gets me off.

This. This is fucking it. Emptying myself on her lips and cheeks. Marking her. It's the best thing, the sweetest pleasure.

That was only the beginning, though. A way to take the edge off.

I'm not done here.

Give me a goodnight kiss, sister, I tell her.

In my head, of course.

Shiloh lets out this tiny huff to the wet head I press to her lips, making me hard all over again.

Such a good girl.

One kiss to her pussy. Her last reward for tonight.

She'll have more of me soon enough.

Soon, the air she breathes will have a name.

That name is Kaleb.

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10

SHILOH

Without a single warning, I'm being yanked out of my nightmare and thrust back into real life.

Waking up in the morning, to light instead of darkness, doesn't comfort me one fucking bit. My heart hammers in my chest. Panic swarms over me like a swarm of bees.

A drop of sweat rolls down my temple. Fingers clutching onto the pillow that I hug tight to my body.

My sticky lips part.

He's here. He's here. He's here, my brain screams at me. *He's beautiful and dangerous, and he's here to hurt you.*

I should give in. In the recesses of my mind, I know I was wrong to lock him out last night. To deny him anything he wished for.

At the very least, I should stay very still and let him come to me. Violate my body. Watch his lean muscles ripple as he fucks me brutally. Mercilessly.

Murder me after the fact.

I do just that and pray. I pray to a God who never answers that no one followed him here. That he won't get caught.

The longer the silence in the room stretches, the more adrenaline rushes through my veins. Anticipating the worst is horrible.

It has my body moving in ways it shouldn't.

Panicked and breathing hard, I snatch the knife I put under my pillow. I roll over, dropping to the floor. The blade glimmers as I point the tip to the

darkness under my bed.

“Kaleb.” Last night, I double and triple-checked that the locks were in place. But there’s no telling what he might do. He did break out of a secure psychiatric hospital, after all. Besides, how else could I explain the stickiness on my lips? “Get out. I don’t want to hurt you. So. Just get out. This silence, how mad you are, I—Stop. Stop it. You’re scaring me. I’m tired of my life being such a fucking mess. So—Fuck, no more of this. Do you hear me? Do you?”

I don’t even know what I’m asking of him. All I know is that this guilt and fear that keeps hitting me hard is making me crazy.

“Kaleb?”

Silence. No movement. No flash of a white mask.

He isn’t here.

And I can’t stop talking. My heart brings the words out of my mouth.

“We’re not going to have a repeat of yesterday. We’ll—You know, start over? We could talk. Apologize to one another.” I lick my lips, tasting salt on them. He’s definitely been here. How? “Then, we could have a conversation. Like two grown-ups. If you still want to kill me, fine.” *Sigh.* “I guess you’ve earned the right to do it. Just—this touching me without my consent. While you hate me. No more of that. We need to talk.”

I’m lying to myself. Yesterday, I got hot in the shower, thinking about his fingers inside me. I clenched my thighs during my classes, because I remembered him moaning and coming for me.

As I stare into the darkness, as I say those things, heat pools at my core. My panties dampen.

I don’t want this. It’s impossible to get turned on by violence.

With my hand firm on the knife’s handle, I edge the knife farther into the dark space under my bed. I poke at the air.

My chest caves in then expands anew as my body alternates between disappointment and relief.

The roller coaster of emotions doesn’t end there, though. I get up, and a metaphorical fist locks around my throat. Squeezes the air out of me.

There’s a new severed finger on my nightstand.

The digit is small and delicate. Different from the others he left for me before.

“Is that a woman’s finger?” Terror raises the hair on the back of my neck. The empty bedroom doesn’t answer. “Is that a message? That I’m

next? Or are you trying to hurt me again? To make me jealous? It isn't working."

Lies.

Images of him being with another woman are a hard blow to the chest. My fingertips brush along my lips, feeling the evidence that he must've come on them. But who's to say it was his first orgasm for the night?

A frustrated groan escapes me. My hand tightens around the knife. The plastic handle digs into my skin, though it does nothing to pull me out of this truly ridiculous flare of jealousy.

No. I'm not jealous. Am not. I'm confused, that's all. A victim of his mind games. Weak as I face my guilt over and over again. My longing. My misplaced emotions.

The fucking finger and fucking Kaleb. I toss it across the room, and it lands beneath my window.

I'm so done with this. With being jealous. Out of everything, this is the worst.

I'd rather be dead.

After a quick scan of my empty apartment, my knife firm in my grip, I come up empty.

Nothing and no one's here. The locks, on the other hand, are undone.

I shake my head, mad at myself for messing up. Again. I'll double and triple-check tonight.

Or maybe I'll leave it open.

Maybe, once he's done punishing me, he'll get out of here.

He'll be safe.

I don't know. I don't *know*.

Best thing to do is get out of here. He'll come to me when it suits him.

Then, I'll convince him to save himself.

If I stay here, waiting, I won't be able to do any of this. I'll drown in adrenaline, anticipation, and fear.

Sitting through another day in college would help me regain some of my sanity. I hope.

There's more I have to do today besides sitting through my classes. I'm on a mission. Now that Kaleb's back, I'm helping him.

Helping us.

I thought I could wait a few years until I could participate in the clinical practice hours. Time has run out.

The sooner I take part in them and actually practice with real people, the sooner I'll be able to understand him. Me. This thing we have.

Once I have the experience and tools to reach out to him, chances are he'll listen. He'll get out of here before they come for him.

He'll be able to leave me behind and save himself.

Which is good. It's a good thing.

But I can't get into the clinical practice hours unless Professor Dempsey signs off on it.

Being at the top of my class won't be enough. I have to dress the part, to announce how serious I am about this. And I will. For Kaleb.

I drop the knife on the kitchen counter and turn to my room just as the alarm goes off. It reminds me that my phone is still there. I need to check and see if anyone's been looking for me. If they suspect anything.

If there's a danger Kaleb needs to know about.

He was cruel to me. I was crueler.

And I never stopped loving him.

The empty screen shouldn't surprise me. I can always count on Dad not to care about me.

I can also count on him to be a control freak. The press isn't blowing up my phone. They won't be following me around campus. They won't find Kaleb.

The unhinged serial killer who has zero sense of boundaries. My stepbrother. The man I shamefully long for.

Browsing through the major news sites online proves that I was right.

His face, mask, and name are out of the news. That's good. It means it's less likely that people will look for him. I bet almost everyone has already forgotten about him. Either that, or they missed the news that aired two nights ago and don't even know he exists.

I shouldn't wish for this, for him to be a free man. I shouldn't. I should fantasize about sticking a knife to his throat for how he violated me.

But he needs my help. He's owed my help. And it's not like I actually suffered. He humiliated me, but I breathed him in. I bathed in his wrath and deviance. I welcomed it.

Sigh.

I'm in and out of the bathroom, treading carefully toward my closet. No strong, cold, and powerful hand grabs for my ankle.

He isn’t here. I can feel it as I choose my clothes for the day. I focus on that instead of the ache in my chest and the worry in my stomach.

A fitted black blouse. Black blazer on top. Black jeans.

My black leather boots will complete my look once my hair and makeup are done. I don’t think I look better or worse with my hair smoothed and my mascara on point, but it’ll send a message.

It’ll scream that I mean business.

Same as it did when I forced my dad’s hand this summer.

I’ll have to make Professor Dempsey hear me out. Then Kaleb.

I will.

Somehow, I will.

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11

SHILOH

A chill, similar to that of yesterday, has settled in my bones throughout the day. A soul-numbing cold I can't shake.

Of course I can't. There's no shaking Kaleb.

Even though I haven't seen him around today.

He's here.

Physically, he shouldn't have been able to get into campus. The security at the front gates wouldn't let him in.

And yet.

"That'll be all for today." My clinical psychology professor, Joe Dempsey, runs a hand through his short, thick blond hair.

A soft sigh comes from somewhere inside the classroom. One of those almost always escapes whenever he rubs his scruff or his hair like that.

The girls and some of the boys here have a serious crush on him.

He won't acknowledge it, though. His blue gaze is constantly harsh, his expression serious.

He goes so far as to create physical boundaries between him and us. When a student waits to talk to him after class is over, he'll ask his TA, Eddy, to stick around.

Eddy is a pretty decent guy. Or at least he wasn't a bad one back then. He and Kaleb went to school together. I remember his picture from Kaleb's yearbook, the one my stepbrother didn't get to see.

They delivered it to our home the summer after he was sent to Berkshire. I don't know why his school did that, why they sent us a

yearbook full of hate.

Freak. Murderer. Psycho.

So many cruel messages. Signed, too.

I cried for days over it. Over their hateful words.

Eddy's wasn't among them.

I feel safe around Eddy, which I can't say about most men.

Being in an all-girls boarding school saved me from having to face my fears of my assault a second time. During my undergrad, I mainly kept to myself.

The only person who could hurt me is Kaleb. He's the only one I want to hurt me.

In another world. Another reality, where he wasn't on the run.

I need to keep him safe.

While I wait, watching a couple of students stand by his desk, I gather my things. I do my best not to think about my stepbrother and if he's okay as I slip my laptop into my side bag. If he has a place to stay. Something to eat.

If he's here on campus and would attack me as soon as I step out of the building. It's dark outside. It would be easy for him.

My stomach churns. My lips pinch. I scoff at myself.

I won't be rattled. I won't live in a constant state of arousal.

I won't.

"Hey, Shiloh." Eddy materializes out of nowhere, lowering himself to the seat next to me.

He doesn't look anything like Professor Dempsey. His black hair is styled in a short buzz cut. Light gray eyes aimed inwardly. My teacher bursts with confidence, while Eddy gives off vibes that he would rather be anywhere else.

"Hey." I sneak a glance at Professor Dempsey. Still there. Back to Eddy, the genius who was able to cram his bachelor's and master's degrees in just five years and is now working on his PhD. The one who hardly ever approaches me. "What's up?"

His brow furrows. "I'm going to cut right to the chase."

Being this direct—especially with me—is out of character for him. He has something important to tell me, and I'm not going to like it.

It takes me less than a second to figure out what this is all about.

Kaleb.

Hot righteousness bubbles in my throat. My shoulders are square.

How dare he?

Kaleb and I might be in our own private war, in our own version of hell, but he's mine.

No one's allowed to talk shit about him.

I'll tell Marina as much next time I see her.

I squint my eyes at him. He flinches. "What is it?"

"Should I be worried?" Eddy smooths his hands over his plaid sweater. "Before you get defensive, I don't judge you for hiding him, if you are, and—"

"Eddy, you have no idea what you're talking about."

"—in fact—"

"Shut up," I snap, doing so as quietly as possible so my teacher won't overhear.

"Hey, all I'm saying is that I would've done the same for my brother." *What is it with the men in my life? Why can't they listen?* "But here's the thing."

My gaze skates to the front of the class. Only one student is left talking to Professor Dempsey.

"What's the *thing*, Eddy?"

"I'm concerned he might show up here."

He.

He.

As if he doesn't have a name. As if Kaleb is a freak, the boogeyman everyone said he is.

I'm seething. Growling. Then I pull it together and roll my eyes.

"It's a serious concern, Shiloh," he emphasizes.

That does it. I've had it up to fucking here. Up to my eyeballs.

Kaleb scares me, too. So much. But so do many of the people we read about in our psychology books.

He's a person like them, damn it.

He saved me. He's just as worthy of therapy. Of acceptance.

Being understood isn't a privilege. It's a right.

The world has neglected my stepbrother for far too long. They left him to rot in a psychiatric hospital for killing the assholes who assaulted me.

The more I think about it, the more I realize that I can't even blame him for killing the guard and driver in his attempt to get out. Eddy watches me

as the cogs turn in my head, his expression one of curiosity.

I understand Kaleb. I understand now why he took from me instead of asking for what he wanted.

He's misunderstood and he needs me. I need him too. Down to my marrow.

We'll have a conversation about boundaries.

Which Eddy won't hear about.

As far as the rest of the world is concerned, Kaleb has never hurt me and never will. I won't give them another reason to hate him. To think he's any less worthy of fundamental human rights.

"Why is that, exactly?" My eyebrows crush together. Eddy jerks back, the movement rattling his chair. "He's been away for eleven years. Been treated by the best doctors. He's not a rabid animal. He deserves to be understood. Treated. Cared for. He deserves a second chance rather than hate and judgment."

"Holy shit." His pupils are huge. Cheeks pale. "You *are* hiding him."

"Am not!" That was a little too loud. My teacher clears his throat, and when I steal a glance at him to apologize, he's smirking? "Sorry," I whisper, then turn to Eddy and his huge, dumb eyes. "I have no idea where he is. All I know is that life fucked him over. We're trying to help people get better here. Come to terms with who they are. Without judgment. Yet here you are, ready to label him and cast him aside."

I can't believe the words that come out of my mouth. Eddy could have my ass kicked out of this class for it. Ban me from campus for good, maybe. It could give Dad a good excuse to commit me.

Fix this, a voice in my head demands as Eddy wrings his hands nervously.

"As his favorite person"—emphasis on the *favorite*—"I know him. He's a good person. But to your question, no, I'm not hiding him. You don't have to be worried about anything. You should, however, check your attitude. You're disrespecting this school and our profession when you talk like that."

"R-right."

"Good." The word is barely out before Eddy flies out of his chair.

"Eddy, where are you going?" Professor Dempsey calls after him.

"Stomach bug!" he shouts from the hall, his shoes thumping as he hurries out into the hallway.

“Is he okay?” My teacher looks at me for explanations. Just him, since the student who talked to him is already gone.

“No idea.” I sling my bag over my shoulder and get up.

“I’ll check on him later.” He shrugs on his leather jacket and heads out.

The feeling of being watched is ever-present. My skin burns with it. Except this isn’t the time to look for Kaleb. It’s time to help us both.

Using my most confident voice, I hurry toward the front of the class. “Professor Dempsey, may I speak with you for a moment?”

“Sure.” Oddly enough, he doesn’t hesitate. Doesn’t mention that Eddy’s gone or that we should talk tomorrow.

Well, it isn’t that odd. It would be rude to blow me off, right?

Right.

When I get close to him, I stop within arm’s reach. Never closer. Ever.

“What’s up?” He tips his head, staring at me. He’s shorter than Kaleb, but still well over six feet tall.

I wait for him to repeat Eddy’s words, or worse.

Your infamous psycho brother is on the run. You being here is a risk. I’m sorry, but you’re out.

One beat. Two beats. Three.

My hopes rise, rise, and rise. There are those people who don’t watch the news. Professor Dempsey might be one of them. Plus, he isn’t from around here. He moved to Seattle from New York two years ago, according to his resume.

With the way my dad rushed to kill the news reports, it’s possible that he’s never heard of Kaleb.

Four. Five. Six.

Except for a brief glance at my lips, Professor Dempsey gives me nothing.

My stomach dips, unease creeping up my spine.

He’s tired. His eyes are droopy because it’s the end of the day.

Instead of freaking out, I focus on the task at hand. “I think I’m ready to start my supervised clinical practice. I know I have two more years before I can start, but I would really appreciate it if you would consider my request.

“Hmm.” He isn’t taken aback by my direct request, nodding almost to himself. His eyes are back on mine. “You think you’re ready?”

“I know I am.” Pressure builds in my temples. It’s the urgency, the need to get it started. That, and the pressure cooker my life has been for the last

two days. “I think—No, I’m confident that I’m ready. Please. Let me sit in on the next one. Let me prove myself.”

His hand raises. I think he’s going to cut through the air. Tell me no.

He doesn’t. He steps closer. Runs his knuckles on my shoulder, then my arm.

Touching me.

A proverbial ice bucket douses me. A sudden cold grips my lungs, and I gasp, grimacing away from his touch. Pulling back until his hand falls to his side.

Eyebrow raised, he stares at me. His expression reflects confidence, serenity. It sends a message that he meant no harm.

I must be overreacting, then. After what Kaleb’s put me through, combined with my fucked-up past, it’s possible. I’m sensitive and distraught. Paranoid.

If Professor Dempsey wanted to assault me, he could’ve done it by now. We’re alone. He’s stronger.

He could overpower me.

He hasn’t.

“Your grades are solid. You do well in class. Okay, let’s give it a try.” His face is serious, professional. At that, air flows back into my lungs. “Be here tomorrow at five. We have three new volunteers for the practice hours. Since this is your first time, I’ll choose a fourth volunteer tonight and interview them while you observe next to me.”

The touching incident disintegrates into nothing. This opportunity—this good news—is everything I could’ve hoped for.

A rare smile slashes across my face. “I won’t let you down.”

His eyes crinkle at the corners. His expression is open and kind. I was worried over nothing. “These hours won’t count for your internship, as you well know.”

“Yes, I know. And it’s totally okay. I’m grateful for the opportunity.”

“You’re welcome.”

Oops. I got so excited that I forgot about my manners.

“Thank you. Thank you. You won’t regret giving me this opportunity.” I clutch onto the strap of my bag, readying myself for my second request. I’ll come off as rude, but I have to try. “Would it be possible to handpick a volunteer who could really use our help? I’d like to dive into the deep end.”

The more complicated the case, the more helpful I can be. The more help I can offer myself and the man who hid under my bed. The gorgeous monster who possesses my days and nights and every other moment in between.

“Usually, I wouldn’t recommend that.” The way his voice lowers, there’s something wrong about it. Something that makes me take half a step back, just to be on the safe side. It could be me, paranoid again. It probably is. “To anyone else. But you’re not anyone else. You’ve worked hard to get my attention, and you’ve succeeded. I see you. You’ve shown interest in class. You’re an active participant. You could manage a complicated case. Yes, it’s very likely you could. I’ll see to it that your first practice will be an interesting one.”

The air in the room turns dense. An ominous feeling clutches at my heart.

Kaleb is here. But where?

“What I’m trying to say is, you’ve earned it.” His eyes bore into mine. “Such a good student, Shiloh.”

He did not just praise me. He couldn’t have.

My lungs squeeze. Airways are clogged.

No, no, no.

No.

He can’t be that person. A pervert.

My stomach revolts, and I press a hand to my throat for a second so I won’t throw up.

This is the first and last time I’m alone in a room with Professor Dempsey. There won’t be any more moments like this. He won’t get to assault me.

From this point forward, I’ll be using him.

I’ll do anything to help Kaleb. My quest for answers used to be semi-selfish. It isn’t anymore.

My stepbrother needs me. I won’t fail him.

First, I need to survive this. Tonight. I have to get the hell out of here without making it weird. Without provoking this predator.

Kaleb isn’t here to help me if my professor strikes. I can’t see him anywhere. He isn’t running into the classroom, cleaver raised. He isn’t here to murder Professor Dempsey.

If he were here, hiding, he wouldn’t stand for it. He’d do something about it.

If Kaleb were here, Professor Dempsey would’ve been dead by now.

So, yeah. I’m guessing I’m all alone.

While I’m contemplating how to slip out safely, my phone starts vibrating in my bag.

“Sorry.” I snatch it, waving it in the air.

“You could—”

“It’s important. See you tomorrow.” I whip around, darting out faster than Eddy did.

“Tomorrow at five.” His voice echoes in the hallway, sounding completely unfazed.

Maybe something happened to him. Maybe it was nothing.

I’m not sticking around to find out. I shout, “Thanks,” and hightail it toward the door that leads outside the building.

Where it’s safe.

Well, *out of here* isn’t exactly safe, either. While Kaleb isn’t inside the building, he’s definitely nearby.

He’d touch me. Kidnap me. Violate me.

It’s still safer than being in that classroom.

It’s a hell of a lot better than being around other men.

Cold breeze howls as soon as I push the door open, whipping at my hair. A couple huddles to my left. Two girls and a guy in warm clothes take a left onto the brick path, disappearing out of sight.

My phone vibrates incessantly, reminding me of its existence. For the first time since it started vibrating, I look at the screen.

“Val, hi.”

“Oh, thank God.” She’s out of breath, her voice choked. “Thank God you picked up.”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Except I know the answer the moment I ask her that.

The delicate finger on my nightstand. The cruel things Marina said to me yesterday about Kaleb.

Ice closes around my throat, colder than the night air.

I curl my fingers around the pocketknife in my coat. When Joe—Professor Dempsey—came at me, I freaked out. Forgot it was there.

I remember it now. One of the pocketknives that I carry with me everywhere I go. A false sense of security.

It won’t stop Kaleb from taking what he wants before I can talk some sense into him. But I have to try.

“Marina.” One word from Val. One word and my bravery vanishes.

The truth is a cold shower. It’s a torch burning the flesh off my bones.

He didn’t have to do that. I would’ve never listened to her.

He could’ve left evidence.

He risked his freedom for nothing.

Deep breath. Concentrate.

Helping him. That’s my main goal in this life. I wasn’t able to do so in the past.

Those days are gone. This person I’ve become will do everything in my power to protect him.

No matter what.

Playing dumb, I ask, “What about Marina?”

I have to get to him. I have to convince him to go somewhere safe. Where he won’t hurt me or violate me to shut me up.

My home. In long, fast strides, I head out of the campus gates and toward my SUV.

“They say she’s dead.” A sob tears out of her. “They found her car and h-h-h—Oh God. Oh, Jesus.”

Her sobs become shrieks that break my heart into a million tiny pieces. Val has always been good to me. Her pain reaches my soul and tugs.

Marina’s death, not so much.

She did insist on getting my brother locked up.

“What?” Information is power, and I’m going to get it. Kaleb could use it. “What is it, Val?”

“She didn’t show up at work this morning.” Heels click in the background. Wherever she is, she’s pacing the floor. “Her dad tracked her phone. It died sometime last night, but the last location, it was in this awful neighborhood. He and one of the security men from his company went there.” A sharp intake of air. “Her car was burned to the ground, Shi. And there were two dead bodies inside it.”

Anger. Fear. A touch of sadness. I’m overwhelmed by it all. He’s gaining confidence; that’s what Marina and her date’s deaths mean. He doesn’t care about being caught.

I throw a glance backward, making sure I’m alone. I am.

Me and the sickening feeling of being stalked. Me and my knife in my palm.

She was wrong to talk about him the way she did.

And it's sick that I understand where Kaleb's coming from. Why he killed her.

Then again, if I really, truly think about it, it wasn't just Eddy and Marina I was furious with.

It was me.

For years, my dad's been semi-successful at brainwashing me against Kaleb. Through abuse and conditioning, during the few times I was allowed to visit my home, he infiltrated my head.

For the most part, he managed to mess with me. I never thought Kaleb was a monster, but I'd learned to tremble whenever his name was mentioned.

I shouldn't have.

I don't anymore. I'll accept whatever punishments he deems fit.

I would have gladly killed Eddy for what he said about him.

What saved him from that fate, if I'm being honest, is the fact that we weren't alone in the classroom. I understand Kaleb, very much so. I'm just pissed that, once again, he risked his freedom for me.

"Fuck." The concern in my voice isn't for Marina. It's for Kaleb. The large campus gates appear in the distance. I'll be in my car soon. "Fuck."

"Where are you? I'm freaking out. Everything is crashing down on me. I can't lose you too."

"I feel sick to my stomach." Sick over the thought of Kaleb getting caught. "Listen, I'm on my way home from college. I'm going to run to my car. I have to hang up."

"Who could've done that?" Panic laces into her tear-soaked voice. "Who could've killed our friend?"

"Breathe, Val. The police will figure it out soon. They always do." Unless my dad bribes them, that is.

"Y-you're right."

"I'll talk to you in the morning." The handle of the pocketknife digs holes into my palm. "Go to bed. Lock your doors and stay safe. That's what I plan to do."

"You're right. I will."

"We'll talk tomorrow. Promise."

“Promise you’ll be okay?” She sniffles, grieving Marina’s death while I have Marina’s finger hidden at home. “I can’t lose you too. I can’t.”

“I’ll be fine.” I never will. As long as Kaleb’s life is on the line, I’ll always be one step from losing it. “Go to bed, please. We’ll worry about the rest in the morning.”

“Okay.” Her whisper is muted by my pulse. It’s hammering in my ears on my jog out of this place. “I love you. Stay safe.”

I’m out in the street, crossing to the alley where I parked my car. “I will. Promise.”

“Say it. I need to hear the words.”

“I’ll stay safe,” I promise. *I hope*. “Love you. Bye.”

The call disconnects.

I get two seconds of silence. Two seconds of walking peacefully toward my Range Rover.

“You’ll never be safe from me.”

His voice sounds from behind me as his gloved hand wraps around my mouth.

The pinching in my neck.

My palm opens on its own, releasing the pocketknife into my coat.

I’m too weak to do or say anything. My vision blurs around the edge.

I’m mildly aware that I lost the fight.

I don’t even have it in me to feel anything other than this…

Drowsiness.

Darkness consumes me.

Before it whisks me away, though, I feel Kaleb’s hand flat on my stomach, pulling me back to his big, muscular body. Cold latex presses against my cheek.

His mask.

“Sweet dreams, Shi.”

My eyes roll to the back of my head.

“The real nightmare will be right here when you wake up.”

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12

KALEB

Fuck, I missed being this close to her. Missed it all day long.

But it was worth it. Every second that I spent teasing her. Building tension between us. Every moment I forced myself to stalk her when I could've been fucking her.

Worth. It.

Watching her looking over her shoulder during her classes. Throughout her lunch break.

How she ran across the campus's paved paths tonight.

Having her fear bleed from her was like shooting heroin into my veins. Addictive. Intense. Destructive.

Overall, it's been a good day.

Other than having to witness that motherfucker Dempsey touch her. I hid in the closet, in one of the classroom's corners. Witnessed the entire fucking thing.

Vowed I'd make him pay.

My body vibrated with barely restrained hatred. Possessiveness threatened to pull me out of my hiding spot and ruin this game for Shiloh and me.

It wasn't the right moment, though. Their conversation gave me an idea. A sick twist to our adventure. Instead of killing him, I manipulated him.

It worked. Tomorrow, Shiloh and I will have a new game to play on her campus.

Tonight, it's just me and her.

The feel of her stomach over my shoulder is a breath of fresh air. Having her this close, carrying her to her apartment, is the closest I'll ever get to heaven.

My Shiloh. The only good thing in my life.

The only thing truly worth destroying.

She makes such a beautiful broken doll.

Her professor is a thing of the past. Nothing and no one will threaten her tonight, other than me. Her phone has been cleared. On the way here, I deleted another missed call from Berkshire. They—Dr. Reynolds, if I had to guess—called minutes after I tossed her into Elron's car.

Fuck that asshole. He'll have to search for another test subject that isn't us.

We get to her apartment building.

Naturally, the PI watching her home is in a deep sleep.

Lucky him.

He gets to keep his life.

For now.

I don't have time to waste on killing a sleeping man when I could be touching Shiloh.

After hours of craving her. Needing her.

I have her.

Mine.

We're in her home, going through the front door this time. She's breathing softly, and I hate that I have to let her go. I really have to, so I place her on the bed.

She thinks this—me, invading her life—is retribution. A punishment since she didn't stand up for me all those years ago.

Soon, she'll realize this isn't what this is about. That it's all a game.

Soon, she'll realize that I could never hate her.

I know who's truly to blame for everything we've gone through.

Ronan Talbot. Her father.

The torture, orgasms, and every ounce of my attention—that's not punishment.

My depraved, repressed sexual needs aren't anything like my violent impulses. They might look and sound similar, but in reality, they're two polar opposites.

The most glaring one is, I don't want Shiloh dead.

Why would I ever want her gone? She's perfect for me.

Beautiful and vulnerable in her drug-induced sleep. Full lips parted. Thick eyelashes fanning over her cheeks. Her body was meant to be defiled by me.

Her soul is the only one I've been desperate to learn. To understand.

To…

Love? Is that what it is?

Never mind.

Tonight, I have her.

She's tempting and hot and mine.

Her clothes have to go. I tear them off her. Toss most of them aside. Put her underwear to good use. As in using her panties to bind her.

One wrist is tied to the metal headboard by her black bra, the other by her black panties.

I'm drawn to her legs, pushing them apart. Running my knuckles over her knees. The inside of her thighs.

The soft glow of the lamp on her nightstand has shadows and highlights playing on her naked body. It's how I see her beautiful, bare pussy.

A sweet temptation.

The part of her I'll destroy first. Once she's conscious again.

Until then, time to play. Time to make her wet while she's knocked out.

She'll be humiliated when she wakes up.

She hated coming for me when I forced myself on her. When she found out whose finger I'd left on her nightstand, she was pissed off and nervous. The cadence of her voice when she spoke to Val—her call records showed that it was the last person she had spoken to—over the phone betrayed those emotions.

So waking up to this? Soaked and upset? Confused as all fuck?

I can't fucking wait to see her face.

I can't wait to touch her.

First, though, I head over to her closet. Take out a black thong and return to the side of her bed. With the thin fabric clutched in my hand and my cock about to tear through my jeans, I rip my mask off.

I put her thong to the side and bend to drag my tongue over her nipple. Getting it hard and wet and fucking beautiful for me. The taste and feel of her. I'm groaning with how much I need her.

Still, I need more. I need all of her.

My lips open for her and wrap around her nipple, sucking it into my mouth.

Years ago, two vile little fuckers touched her there. Took what wasn't theirs.

Her. Breasts. Are. Mine.

I'm starving for her, sucking and biting. Tugging and licking.

Leaving my marks on her skin.

A reminder that I own her. Something she'll shudder at when she looks in the mirror the next day. A view I'll come so fucking hard to.

I'm throbbing, aching. Needing her hurts on a visceral level. Missing her is an unfamiliar pain—one I understand only now that I've touched her like that. Now that I know how right she feels.

But I'm not here for my pleasure alone. It's her humiliation I'm after.

Dragging two fingers along her pussy tells me I'm getting there.

She's soaked for me. I can make her body sing for me.

I look down at her.

Hmm. Seems we've got a problem here.

Her other breast is still bare from my marks.

Unacceptable.

With my hand splayed on her hip, I lean forward and take it into my mouth. I sink my teeth into her as if I'm trying to draw blood. Suck on it in a way I know would make her cry out in pain.

If she were up.

The fact that she's knocked out turns me on more. Having her sleeping, bound, and at my mercy.

My prisoner for the night. My sweet, tortured lover.

When both her breasts are red and bruised, I soak my fingers in her arousal again and shove them into her mouth. Her teeth offer a delicious pain, her plump lips a sweet caress.

I never needed this from anyone else. I need all of it from her.

"You like being my slut, don't you?" I pull on her bottom lip, darting my tongue out to taste her upper one. When I'm done cleaning her arousal, I gather saliva in my mouth and spit into hers. "Yeah, you do. You could've hired security to protect you. Could've gone to the police. But no. You've been waiting for me. Deny it all you like, but you're mine."

Another lick. Another spit into her mouth. I was wrong before—heroin's got nothing on her. On my Shiloh.

She’s a lethal injection and I’m willingly handing over my arm for her.

“You’ve been saving yourself for me. You’re going to get me.” Pressing my fingers to her tongue, I rub my saliva into her mouth. Forcing another part of myself into my stepsister. “You’ll get me in your waking hours. When you sleep, I’ll haunt your dreams, little one. And you’ll love it. God knows I do.”

“Mmm,” she hums.

My cock jumps as her tongue pushes against me. As her lips move around my fingers.

Coming while I finger-fuck her mouth isn’t happening tonight. I’m not wasting one fucking drop in my jeans.

It’s going into her mouth. Her cunt. On her body.

After I mess with her head. Show her just how painful it’s been for me when she’s fucked with mine for years.

Being invaded by her is unsettling. Having her rushing through my veins is a mind-fuck.

This up close, it feels like I’m the one bound to the bed. Bound to *her*.

During my time at Berkshire, I wasn’t actually locked away. I could always escape. I knew that one day I would.

There’s no escaping Shiloh.

I get that now as I remove my fingers from her mouth. As I smear her spit across her pillowy lips.

Little, addictive Shiloh.

I’m tracing my fingers lower down her body, circling both her nipples.

Fuck, I’ve got so much to do. So much pain to inflict on this helpless woman.

She said she didn’t want me?

When she wakes up edged, soaked, dying to come, she might sing a different tune.

She might beg me to kill her again.

What a fucking turn-on that would be.

Already is.

A groan escapes me as soon as my fingers settle into her pussy. Two, up to the second knuckle. Too deep and I could break her hymen.

My fingers won’t get the honor. Hell fucking no.

My cock will split her in half. My ears will get to enjoy her screams.

“Wet and tight for me. Hmm.” I pump in and out of her. Curl my fingers the way that made her scream in pain and pleasure. “Your hot pussy sucks me in. Begging me to get you off.”

Her clit is hard under my thumb. I want to make her wetter. Have her wake up horrified at how her body reacted to me while she was passed out.

There’ll be no denying it. No avoiding the mortification.

Her tortured expression. The agony of having her pussy hot and clenching and desperate for release.

Can’t. Fucking. Take. It.

From my place at the edge of her bed, I free my cock, rubbing the pierced tip on her lips.

Not enough. Need more.

Digging my hand into her thigh, I spread her wider for me. Grab her thin thong and mash it on her cunt. Drenching it with her arousal.

Getting harder than I am now should be impossible. Except my flawed, thrumming human body shows me that yes, it is possible. It hurts, this *wanting*. This constant need.

The black material darkens as I drag it back out and looking at it awakens the possessive side within me more than before. The territorial madman who’s so thoroughly obsessed with her.

Watching her isn’t cutting it, though. I need her.

I need this—fuck, yes—her wet thong around my cock drives all the blood in my body down south. I curse under my breath, looking at her face while I use her underwear to jerk off.

“Look at you, Shiloh. Look at how much you need me.” I put my knees on the bed. Press two fingers on that spot inside her pussy that swells with my touch. I keep jerking off to her. Can’t hold back. “You’d curse me if you were awake for this. You can’t now. You’re silent. Obedient. Mine.”

Her thong slides up and down my length, spreading her arousal on me. The thong she wore. The material that was once tucked between her legs. Grazed her cunt. Her ass. Christ.

I’ve fucked my hand before. Fucked the pillow as I stared at her picture. Fantasized about my hand around her neck. About her twisted expression as pain burned through her.

Nothing has ever come close to this.

What I would give to see her cry.

She *will* cry for me.

She’ll weep.

Her pussy sure does. She squeezes around me. Her juices drip down my hand and to my wrist. She must be close.

So. Goddamn. Close.

That’s when I pull them out. I make her wait, make her need it badly while I chase my pleasure, spilling myself on her pussy. While I turn my good girl into a dirty one.

It must feel awful to be left like this. Unattended to.

I’m a bastard. Her worst nightmare.

She shouldn’t expect any less from me.

I don’t expect any less of me.

What’s strange is that I’m not calm.

In many ways, this woman is supposed to be my captive. I’m the one who’s supposed to be under control.

Yet she’s the one consuming me.

That makes me want to hurt her all the more.

Just until we’re equals.

That’s why I step back. Stuff her used thong in my jeans. Tuck myself in. Leave her bedroom.

No better way to soothe this chaos inside of me than walking it off. Do some digging around her house.

It’s a constant pain in my chest to have her out of my sight. A pain so strong that my bones protest. An invisible rope pulls me back to her. It’s all I can do to stay out of that room.

Focus.

My version of sanity is back as I start browsing through her things without worrying that she might wake up or stop me.

Her apartment is in perfect condition. Clothes inside the hamper and closet, not scattered around the floor. The sink is empty. The granite counter is sparkling.

The more I see how organized her life is, the more determined I am to make a mess of it.

She wasn’t meant for this life.

This…boredom.

A soul that burns as bright as Shiloh’s isn’t supposed to be caged in this perfect little home. Isn’t supposed to be shackled to this mundane routine.

When I start heading back to her room, I notice something. The bookshelves that line the walls of her living room aren't as perfect as the rest of the place.

Something that shouldn't be there sticks out like a sore thumb.

"What do we have here?" I pull out a thick, black binder that stands out from her other textbooks.

The spine is tattered and old. Its age shows. I carry it with me to the kitchen, switch on the light, and set the binder on her dining table.

My jaw clenches at what I see on the first page. A contract between her and her dad. A signed agreement states that Shiloh is prohibited from contacting, responding to, or being interviewed by any media outlet.

In exchange for allowing her to live here, in Seattle.

So that's why she stayed away. The bastard refused to let her come back home.

She found a way to manipulate him anyway, my clever sister.

The man is beyond obsessed with appearances. Even that indie reporter Jerome warned me about has gone silent. It has to be him.

Shiloh could've ruined the miserable control freak with the snap of her fingers. She could've told the press a story so tragic they'd be salivating for an exclusive. Or they'd go over their editors' heads altogether and get her an exclusive book deal. Anything.

Instead, she signed this contract.

She twisted his arm so he'd step down and let her come home.

Close to me.

Fuck her dad. Fuck this contract.

Once I'm done letting out years of frustration and making her truly mine, we're taking him down.

Which has been the plan all along. Him and my doormat of a mother.

Thoughts of a bright future together are cut abruptly when I turn the pages of the binder.

These are letters.

Addressed to me.

She wrote the date on the top of each page. The first one is dated eleven years ago.

I flip through them. The last one is from a year ago.

She's been writing to me. Letters she couldn't send. Or maybe she'd been too afraid to send them. Contacting a monster is dangerous.

Finally, though, they're in my possession. The letters I've been desperate for.

The warmth in my chest. The heat behind my eyes.

What the fuck is this?

I'm weak for them. For her.

I should go back to her bedroom. Hurt her until she wakes up from her drug-induced sleep. Act like myself.

I won't be so alone once she's up.

But my feet are planted on the floor. My fingertips trace the old paper of that first letter. My eyes fixate on the words.

Kaleb,

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

For everything.

For not screaming in the court because it hurt when Daddy slapped me.

For being sad when you're the one who's locked up.

I'm selfish for hurting this bad. For missing you so much.

Daddy tells me I'm stupid. That you're awful and the worst. That you would've killed me, too.

Would you?

I hope he's wrong.

I hate that he says it so much that I start believing it.

You killed the boys that hurt me. Just them.

Right?

Right?

I'm so sorry.

Come back. Please. I hate it here without you.

Your stepsister,

Shiloh

Tightness eradicates the warmth in my chest. Darkness clouds my vision.

My mom forced him to keep me around. He couldn't separate Shiloh and me while I lived there and behaved.

Then I murdered her abusers, playing right into his hands.

Sure, it humiliated him, being called downtown to the police station. Discussing his daughter's assault. He was ashamed of her for being a victim, the motherfucker.

He must've gloated after I'd avenged her.

He hated me. He was scared of me, same as the rest of them. I didn't let him hurt Shiloh.

I sure as fuck wouldn't have let him send her off to a boarding school.

Right before the police came for me, I was about to kill him for hinting she should be shamed for being a victim.

Now that I'm out, he has to know I'm coming for him.

The bastard has done everything in his power to make sure I'd never get out. That Shiloh would never come back for me by sending her away and brainwashing her. By forbidding her from sending me these letters.

My nostrils flare as I continue to browse through them. At how lonely she'd been in LA. How, when she came home for the holidays—*appearances*, the letters say—his brainwashing had gotten worse and worse.

Shiloh's *I miss you* and *I'm sorry* slowly dwindle. They're replaced with *You scare me* and *please, don't hate me. Please, don't kill me. Or if you do, be quick about it.*

There's no mention of my mom, obviously. A pretty, useless wallflower. An empty shell.

I slow down when the content of her letters changes. Again.

Shiloh was in her senior year and wrote to me about choosing her major.

She missed me. It says so right fucking there. She didn't understand why she'd miss a man who could kill her. Why she'd develop feelings for the person inside her head, one she hadn't seen in years. One who she shouldn't like. Her stepbrother.

But it wasn't all about her. She wanted to learn about me. She was curious to find out why I was the way I was.

She wasn't selfish. Not her.

She was falling for me. She always loved me, and she needed to make sense of it.

Of both of us.

Poor thing. My poor little Shiloh needs outsiders' help to figure out this thing between us.

She doesn't need her school. She doesn't need anyone else.

She needs me.

Time to make things right. To teach Shiloh that valuable lesson no professor ever could.

That I'm her entire world just be-fucking-cause.

Me.
And guess how I'll do it?
The hard, painful way.
My way.

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13

SHILOH

A searing pain in my scalp jolts me out of my deep slumber.

Or is it the pressure between my legs that woke me up? This inexplicable need to come?

Confusion settles into my bones, hot and thick.

But it still isn't as agonizing as the need to come. I'm wound up tight, and I haven't even touched myself. I couldn't have.

I've been out until this moment.

After I was grabbed in an alley.

That prick in my neck…

I was drugged.

By him. My stepbrother.

Flashbacks come and go. They're blurry. Unclear. Bits and pieces of them.

They seem like a dream.

They aren't.

God, this ache. This craving. This tugging on my hair.

This strange angle of my head. It should be tilted upward when someone pulls on my hair. Instead, it's twisted to the side.

That thought is a fleeting one.

My need for relief is back. I'm overwhelmed by it. Can't breathe from how intense it is.

The pressure in my lower belly makes me feel hot and desperate.

I'm on the verge of losing my mind. Or throwing up.

Definitely losing my mind.

I'm about to give in to it. I'll open my eyes and truly wake up to this sweet, painful hell I'm in.

I won't.

He touched me while I was out; there's no denying that. The sting in my breasts means he did something to them. And my pussy, fuck, I'm soaked.

It's too good. It's hell on Earth.

I don't open my eyes, pretending to be asleep.

Kaleb isn't having it. He's pulling so hard the roots of my hair burn. He's hurting me.

A part of me—the sick and depraved part—screams from within to just go with it. Let him have me.

Let *me* have him.

The sane part of me is furious at him for many, many reasons. It knows that losing this battle could be the end of both of us.

He has to learn to treat me right.

He has to realize this could end up with him getting caught, damn him.

I won't clench my thighs. But I want to. It's humiliating, how much I want it. This degradation. This abuse.

I hated it when those kids forced themselves on me.

I can't bring myself to hate it now.

I can't even bring myself to care about it. To worry about what it says about me.

With every passing second, my desire grows. Multiplies. Lust makes me dizzy. My lungs are on fire.

The nausea is all but gone. So is the drowsiness.

I'm in the process of listening to my body. Of checking on my arms that feel stretched. My wrists.

They're held over my head, but—

"I know you're awake." His voice is demanding.

Tap, tap, tap on my lips. The blunt, smooth head of his cock. A metallic piercing, too, slapping my mouth in a consistent tempo.

It's the worst. *I'm* the worst for being unbelievably hot for this. The urge to slip my tongue out, to have just a little taste—

No. Even though the pain in my scalp is gone. Even though I need to come so bad I could cry.

I feel awful enough as it is. I've already forgiven him for killing my friend. Acquaintance. Whatever.

He has to learn—*fuck, my mouth waters to taste the tip of his cock*—he seriously has to—*what will his piercing feel like when it hits the back of my throat?*—that I have boundaries.

Boundaries I've set up for him.

For us.

My eyes fly open, taking in the dimly lit room.

At the edge of my bed stands a masked man, holding me down by my forehead while he rubs his precum on my lips. His black eyes aren't focused on my face. He's scanning the length of my naked body.

Shame washes over me, burning me worse than my rage. Than my desire.

His hand slides down to the back of my head, slipping between my head and the pillow. Making a fist in my hair again.

I gasp at the rough tug. His cock demands entry inside my mouth, the barbell grazing my closed lips.

His gaze moves to my face, sending shivers up my spine.

"Kaleb."

No verbal reply. But the torture continues. My pussy is soaked, my head is a mess.

My hands. I need them to grip him. To get Kaleb to release my hair. When I yank at them, nothing happens. He has me bound to the bed.

I twist my head slightly to the side. He won't allow me much more than that. He's forcing me to talk with his dick in my mouth. "Are you going to violate me again?"

He tilts his head. "Shiloh."

At the sound of his rugged voice, the ache in my pussy intensifies. It's not fair that he can do that.

Crawl inside my head. See through me the way no one ever has.

"You tied me up," I murmur while he taps the corner of my mouth with his cock.

"I did." He teases me by pushing in an inch. Taunting me by rubbing a bead of his precum on the tip of my tongue.

I hate him for tasting so good. I hate his piercing for making the need to come worse. I don't focus on that in the slightest. Or the thought of when he got pierced, and if he let someone else in the hospital suck on it.

I don’t. I turn my head again.

“You used my clothes to tie me up.” This is as much clarity and fight as I can muster. I can feel the texture of my bra. My panties. I’d know them anywhere.

“Observant little thing.”

I am, and it’s not just about my binds.

I notice everything about him, too. His mask. His shirtless body. His sculpted abs, all eight of them. Those V-shaped hip muscles that lead down to his dick.

His big, menacing, and goddamn intoxicating dick.

He’s playing with me. Pressing the crown of his cock deeper into my mouth and pulling out.

I might be tied up, but I will get back at him for this. I have the power to torture him back.

While giving in to my desires.

I dart my tongue out and lap the head. Flick it against the piercing.

He groans and my pussy clenches on air. Over and over.

Then I push him out of my mouth.

“Let me go.” That’s the right thing to say. That’s what I’m supposed to say. He’s wrong to treat me like this. To dare ruin everything. He is. As much as I’m wet for it, he has to stop. “Untie me. Now.”

“I don’t think so.” His grip on my hair intensifies. I bare my teeth at him, threatening to bite. Knowing I won’t. “See, you’ve had years to do it your way. By yourself. Others took advantage of you. Manipulated you while I was gone. So no, I’m not letting you go. I’m done being your kind, older brother. You don’t need that crap. You’re a mess. I’m here to fix you. To remind you who you were always meant to be.”

“By killing Marina.” Tugging against my binds isn’t getting me anywhere. “By taking an unnecessary risk. You could’ve gotten caught. I hate you.”

I mean to use my harsh voice. I try to sound like I have a goddamn clue about my life.

I fail.

The lie that I’m mad about him is out there, in the air between us. I heard it. He sure did.

Kaleb tsks behind the mask. His cock throbs for me. Jerks against my lips as more precum trickles on my tongue.

My entire body pulsates for him. Electricity flows through me. They change me into this person I don't recognize. I no longer care about getting caught. I don't care about anything other than this elusive orgasm that's driving me insane.

And pleasuring him. God, it'll be so hot if I could make him come.

He won't let me.

"What did you do to me?" Frustration spills out in the form of tears. I can't focus on anything other than that. "I need to come, Kaleb. Why does it hurt? Why did you leave me like this?"

"I drugged you. I touched you." His cock is still resting on my mouth, his voice a sharp whip. "You're drenching the sheets like the horny slut that you are because of me."

"Why?" Truthfully, I don't care why. I care about him. I care about this orgasm that won't come. Fuck, it's messing with my head.

"First, I thought it was about getting even. I needed to get under your skin. You've burrowed yourself deep under mine. It was only fair." No, it isn't fair. Nothing about this is when he's calm while I rub my thighs together mindlessly. "But in light of new information, my goals have changed. This, what I'm doing, is giving you what you need. And that's me. So no more of that *I don't want you* BS. I know for a fact that it's a lie. You're going to listen to me. You're going to get what I'm telling you through your head. The hard way. Then I'll fuck your virgin pussy. You asked why? This is it. You. It's for you."

"Stop it." *Please, more. Please, I'm sick and you're my cure.* "Stop it."

"This"—the last tug on my hair has me swallowing a scream—"is how it's going to go. The world as you know it ceases to exist today. The rest of the people? They're nothing to you. To us. Fucking shadows. There's only me. No one else. Fuck Marina for trying to rip us apart. Fuck your dad for poisoning your head."

I figured he overheard Marina. But—"How did you find out about my dad?"

"You've been asleep for a while." He has one hand on the base of his cock. The other is no longer on my hair. He uses it to tug my bottom lip down. Bending me to his will. "Let's just say I made myself at home."

My letters. He read them. All those words I wished to tell him but never could. All those feelings.

Humiliation floods me. Kaleb's invading in every possible way.

My body. My heart. My privacy.

A feral, unhinged bulldozer.

The one person who's ever truly cared about me.

However, what he's doing is wrong. He can't expect me to lie here and take it.

"You're hoping for an explanation. Maybe wishing to be *normal*." The thick head of his cock pushes past my lips. Just the head, and Kaleb grunts. Even without seeing his face, I can tell it's costing him to hold back. "There's no *normal* for either of us. No explaining what we have. No stopping this, either. *We* are happening, little sister. Sick and fucked-up and real. Do you hear me?"

I'm baring my teeth again, ready to bite. He shakes his head. So slow and terrifying. A turn-on that has my sore nipples peaking.

"Good girl." Heat rushes down my body at his praise. At the fact that I'm one of the rare people he chooses to talk to. This beautiful monster keeps choosing me. "However, as good as you are, you haven't learned anything yet. I'm going to teach you, Shiloh. Going to hurt you."

My lips part wider. A scream rises in my throat.

And Kaleb shoves his thick cock inside my mouth, shutting me up.

"No screaming unless I tell you to." He moves his hand to my jaw, squeezing it. Tilting my head to the side so he can go deeper.

I thrash against my binds, whipping my body in his direction so I can kick him. He's unmovable—standing there, strong and unrelenting.

Mine.

I stop trying to kick him. Can't bring myself to hate how he fills my mouth. The weight of him on my tongue.

His piercing is almost there, almost at the back of my throat.

"No calling for fucking help. Try and…" He thrusts his hips forward, slamming into me again. I cough around him. I hate him. God, I'm so hot for this. "I'll choke you with my dick for being a brat. Is that what you want?"

What I want is to kill him for humiliating me. For punishing me as if I'm a little girl. For controlling me. For shutting me up.

What I want even more is to suck him off.

The ache and need in my pussy demand that I give him pleasure in return.

After years of missing him, he’s finally here. He risked everything to come back to me.

I stop resisting him altogether, pressing my lips to his cock. Glaring at him. Begging him to go on.

I’m losing my mind.

“Ah, there she is. My Shiloh.” He pummels into my mouth, over and over. His piercing grazes my tongue, my palate. He fucks my throat, harder, faster. I let him. I get off on it. “That’s my girl. Oh, *fuck*. Fuck. Your lips wrap around me so beautifully. Your fucking throat. Fuck. You’re a whore, you know that? My whore.”

My moan and submission are his. But I need him to touch me. I need his hand there. I—

Too fast, too abruptly, he stops. Kaleb holds perfectly still as he runs his knuckles along my jawline. They’re rough and demanding, just like him, and I shiver. A full body tremor.

What more could I give him? What would make him touch me? Tears rise again. I’m sick, aren’t I? Desperate for my stepbrother’s cock and degradation.

I arch my back for him. Twist my body toward him.

Please. Whatever it is you’re doing to me, I need it. Please.

“I’m going to bury my cock in your virgin cunt.” Each word is delivered slowly. Strained with the effort to hold back. This cruel man and even crueler lover. “I’ve been saving myself for you, little sister. You’re mine.”

He sinks into me in a brutal shove, and I hollow my cheeks, swallowing instead of gagging. His cock jerks in my mouth in response.

“Stop that.” This new, vicious hold on my chin is a brutal punishment. “I’m done coming in my jeans. Or on your pussy. Or anywhere other than inside your cunt.”

My surprised gasp earns me a rough chuckle. Another shove of his cock down my throat.

“You get it now, don’t you? Why your cunt is soaked? Why you’re willing to do anything I tell you to, just so that you can finally come?” He rubs his thumb on my jaw, but there’s no comfort in his touch. Only more threats. It’s so fucked that I’m melting for it. “Such a needy little thing. You know, you were dripping when I edged you. Your eyes were closed, and your pussy wept for me. You squeezed my fingers, and that’s when I

stopped pleasuring you. I meant for you to wake up in pain. With need. You're exquisite when you're humiliated."

We stare each other down, and I hate myself. He's telling me about how he violated me while I was unconscious. How he gets off on my shame.

Instead of being repulsed, all I think about is coming.

"And guess what? *I* came. You have my cum on your clit. On this pretty swollen pussy." He gathers the spit that dribbles down my chin and rubs it on my cheek. "I'm going to bury myself inside you next. You could choose to let me take you, be a good girl, and not cry for help. Or…"

He thickens in my mouth. His precum is the most delicious, the most horrible thing.

"If you make a sound. The smallest one—anything louder than a whisper, trust that I won't be merciful."

His threat takes on a physical form when he drives his hips forward, blocking my airways. Gagging shouldn't be such a turn-on.

It is a turn-on. I do want him.

My cheeks heat and tears sting my eyes.

"I'll spend hours deep-throating you. Emptying myself inside your mouth. Waiting to be hard again and start all over. That's how you'll spend the night if you're bad."

When he removes his mask, it's another assault on my senses. The sharp lines of his jaw. The insane, possessive glint in his eyes. The sexy scruff. Every part of him is gorgeous. Exactly what you'd expect of a predator.

"You'll be quiet for me," he warns. "Or you'll learn to be quiet. Hum once for yes."

He's not fucking around. He'll take me. Choke me. I bet that if I black out, he'll just keep fucking my mouth harder. Rougher.

I don't hate it. I just need him inside me. So I hum.

"Good fucking girl." My breath hitches as soon as he leaves my mouth. I cough as he shoves his jeans and boxers down, as he's climbing onto the bed.

Kaleb pushes my legs apart, settling between them. I'm bare to him, and that, too, is mortifying. No one's ever seen me like this but him. I had his mask there, but this is something else.

His golden eyes on my sex. The hunger in them. Nothing can or will compare to this.

I don’t think I can take the tension anymore. I think my lungs are going to burn. Explode. He’s the reason my breaths are labored and the nerve endings in my body spark to life.

I’m going to die like this. Of anticipation and fear.

Except he won’t let me.

Kaleb climbs higher up my body, and I watch him flattening a hand on my navel. Lowering his mouth to my breast.

Biting me.

Pain slams into me, and I cry out. I might be saying something like why, though I can’t be sure. Can’t be sure of anything other than the sting.

“I marked you with my teeth. Am marking and will always fucking mark you like that.” Menacing eyes snap to mine. “I get off on that. More importantly, though, it’s a way to make you see.”

“S-see what?” I ask, sounding raspy from the drugs.

He lets out a huff, the corner of his mouth quirking up slightly. As if that should explain everything.

I arch my back. Demanding his touch. His voice. His words.

Anything but his silence.

I get exactly what I’ve been asking for. His cock thickens on my wet thigh. He growls as he sucks my nipple into his mouth.

Then he gives me a real answer.

“That you belong to me. Before I left, other people thought they could have you. Thieves. Motherfuckers who had their hands on what was mine. That’s you. You were mine to protect, and they took you. The world took you from me next. No more of that. Fucking ever. Every part of you is mine. I’ll hurt your breasts. Bite your nipples.” He does just that, wrapping one in his palm, sinking his teeth into it. Mercilessly slapping the other. “Mark you. Me, their owner.”

“Please.” Words fail me, but my body doesn’t. I fight my restraints, fight the concept of right and wrong in my head, putting everything into pressing my body to his.

It happens at the exact moment that Kaleb grinds his hips into mine. The pierced tip of him rubs my clit, and nothing else exists in my world. I’m shaking and biting the inside of my cheek, and, oh *God*—

The orgasm that’s been building inside detonates. Heat washes across my body, pulsating through me.

Leaving me boneless. His.

He watches, rocking and grinding against me through it. Then, when I'm almost down to earth, almost landed, he grabs my jaw and crushes his lips to mine.

This kiss is visceral and out of control. This kiss is lust and craving so powerful that it's hard to breathe.

Hard to think.

Still, I see this. I feel this. We're fighting each other.

Me, to survive him. Him, to ruin me. The only way he knows how to love.

I should've realized it sooner. Shouldn't have denied him anything.

Or maybe I should've.

Maybe it's good that I did. Every muscle in his body is strained, hard rock against my soft curves. He won't stop this harsh, delicious movement of his hips.

His need is a living thing between us.

Fighting him turns him on.

"Gonna fuck you good, little sister." His crude words set me on fire. I'm fucked in the head for spreading my legs wider for him. For my stepbrother. I'm sick, but I've finally accepted it. He made me accept it. "I hope it hurts. Hope you'll remember how mine you are for the rest of your life."

Begging him to be gentle is pointless.

He'll hear the lie in my voice.

"Hurt me." The pierced tip of his cock lines my pussy, another threat out of many. "Hurt me, Kaleb. I've never been anyone else's. I never wanted anyone else. I was wrong to think that you hated me. I was wrong to let you suffer."

A sound that's every bit of a threat is accompanied by his hand on my throat.

"But it's taboo," I continue, breathless. Needy. Scared. "You're a murderer. A serial killer. You violated me."

His thick eyebrows crush together. "I didn't violate you. You're mine."

He's right. Maybe that's the worst part of it. The best. The one explanation I could never find in any textbook.

"What's wrong with us?" A tear slips out.

"Nothing." He licks it, groaning against my skin. "It terrifies you to see that, but don't worry. That's where I come in."

My pulse beats fast and loud. My blood would burst through my veins if it could.

Nothing separates us. No masks, metaphorical or real. The air crackles in the room. So much violence. Anger. Passion. We're drowning in it.

"Kaleb—" I start.

"Enough talking." He slams into me. No warning. No tenderness. None of that.

Not from him.

I press my lips shut to suppress a scream of agony. Of pleasure. I'm being stretched, torn, and owned. Thoroughly. Completely. Without regard or care.

Kaleb just takes.

Even if I could scream, I wouldn't have told him no.

"Fuck. Fuck, Shiloh." He curses as he stares at me, his eyes narrowed. Brow pinched. His cock throbs inside me. As his free hand cups my cheek, he buries his fingers into my skin. "You're so goddamn tight." He pulls back, pushing back in. "Jesus. Oh, fuck. Sucking me in like that. Your pussy is such a dirty fucking girl, you know that?"

"It's too much." I'm unable to control myself. To stay still and take what I asked for. What I need. I need him. I need the pain. Can't. There's so much of him. I thrash against my bindings. Squeezing my legs against his lean ones. "Out. Get out of me. It hurts."

"You don't mean it." He grows harder and thicker inside of me. Pushes in deeper. "This." Kaleb drags his cock out, slamming into me again in a way that has me gasping for air. "Is mine. I have nothing else. I have no one else. All I have in this goddamn world is you. You'll let me take you. You'll let me fuck you. All you need to do is breathe through the pain."

This last stroke of his cock pins me down to the bed. Slivers of pleasure layer over the sting, but fuck, it's a lot. I never thought—never imagined—

"Hard. Fast. Slow. Painful." When his lips brush mine, it's a stark contradiction to his rough thrusts. Another way to mess with my head. "I'll fuck you however the hell I please. I'll decide what's best for you. And here's why."

My nipples are taut, breasts swollen. The ache to be defiled is like nothing else.

The soreness is lessening as he keeps thrusting into me.

So. Wrong.

So right.

“Why?”

He smirks at the change in me. Such a rarity. Like a black diamond.

“You’ll like it. You’ll end up on your knees, day and fucking night.” His lips coast along my jawline, my throat. His cock impales me, demanding that I submit. That I let go. “Begging for me like the sweet whore you are.”

“Oh God. Oh my—oh—*oh*—fuck.” This orgasm isn’t an orgasm I’ve experienced before.

It’s a seismic wave that steals my breath from me. My senses. Kaleb’s talking, but I don’t hear him. I barely see or feel anything. I float, float, float.

Then I slam back down to earth.

“Beautiful. Yes. Yes, keep coming for me. Don’t you dare stop.” I hear everything and now it’s loud. His hoarse voice. The slapping of our bodies. “I could look at you for days. Years. Make you come just like that and I’ll never have enough. I’ll take care of you. No one else. Me.”

His confidence is intoxicating. His thumb rubs my throat. The ripped muscles of his stomach roll against my clit, elongating my climax.

He’s giving me pleasure like nothing I’ve ever experienced. How is that even possible? He’s a virgin. He told me so.

But Jesus. I can’t stop coming. I’m delirious with it.

“That look you’re giving me. Wipe the surprise off your face, Shi.” His lips twist in a snarl. Despite how much he cares for me, he’s still Kaleb. Harsh. Relentless. Ruthless as hell. “I didn’t need to fuck anyone else to know how to fuck *you*.”

His fist tightens around my throat.

“Please.” The lack of air is giving me a heady feeling. I’m hurting everywhere, my wrists, my breasts, my pussy. I think I might black out. I think I might love it. “Please. I’m sorry. You. You know how to fuck me. How to take care of me. You.”

“That’s my girl,” he groans, his mouth pressing into mine. Our tongues swipe against one another, and there’s nothing wrong with us anymore. How could I believe there ever was? “Come for me. Again. Milk my cock fucking dry. Want to fill you up with babies.”

Babies.

It’s crossing a line. Worse than that.

There’s no line at all.

We’re burning it down.

Both of us. Because, as crazy as it might sound, I want it. Him. A home together. When the time is right. I’d exchange my soul to have it. For years, something has been missing from my life.

Then Kaleb said *babies*, and everything made sense.

The timing isn’t right, though.

You know what, fuck the timing. I don’t care about anything else right now. Just him.

“Help me,” I beg, the need turning me into a mindless woman I don’t recognize. “Help me. I need you.”

An evil glint flashes behind his eyes. He destroys me with one last kiss before getting up on his knees, lifting my ass and railing me. Deeper, somehow. His barbell. His cock. His touch. Fuck.

When his gaze cuts to the place where our bodies are joined, his jaw tightens.

“What?” I haven’t done this before. Maybe he’s disappointed. I won’t be able to take it if he is. Anything but that. “What’s wrong?”

He pulls back, pausing to run a finger over his length. Getting blood on his fingertip.

Then he brings it to his nose.

And inhales the scent.

Before I have a chance to be mortified, Kaleb sucks it into his mouth, groaning as he drags it in and out of him.

I’ve never witnessed pleasure on anyone the way it spreads over his face. He slams his eyes shut. Scrunches his brow. It’s the pain of wanting something so much that it hurts.

He releases them with a pop and pinches my clit, flicking it with his thumb. Rubbing it in maddening circles and soaking me with his spit and my blood.

He’s a feral man. Brutal. Completely deranged. Unbearably handsome with his etched muscles and hands that drive me to the brink of insanity. He’s—

“Mine.” He completes the sentence in my head and returns to fucking me. “Nothing wrong. Nothing could ever be wrong when it comes to you.”

“Yours,” I moan as he commands another orgasm from me. “I’m yours.”

“Going to fill you up.” He’s back to leaning over me, hand wrapped around my throat. “So close. God, I want you. This…This is the most I’ve wanted anything. Take me. Please, Shiloh.”

He barely finishes his sentence when he empties himself inside of me. He pounds his heat into me, groaning, pressing his forehead to mine.

I’m shaking while he’s there, still and powerful, grabbing both my cheeks. I’m limbless and sated, while Kaleb’s muscles feel like they’re made of stone.

He’s protecting me, I realize. Grabbing onto me.

“We need to talk,” I whisper once I’m no longer floating in outer space. About the letters I couldn’t send him. About boundaries and our life together. About Dad and getting away from him. “Please.”

His eyes cloud.

“Stay. I’m begging you.” I lean up as much as possible, pressing a kiss to his lips, which are red with my blood. “I’m asking you to stay. There are things we need to discuss.” I sigh. It’s a struggle to stitch one word to the next. I try, for him. For us. “So many things. We have to figure them out together.”

“We will. When I decide it’s time.” His deft fingers work the binds above my head. His mouth presses on my forehead the entire time. “I have other plans for us.”

“What plans?”

His response is to shove himself deeper inside me.

“Tell me.”

“Not going to ruin the fun. This time around, we’re doing things my way.”

Relief rushes through me when he releases my first wrist, then the other. He massages them, soothes the skin, then pulls out of me and sits on his heels. I lean on my forearms, flushed and hot and naked.

“You know what, Kaleb?” I’m determined to protect him. He won’t stop me. “No, we aren’t. You’re going to listen to me.”

He raises an eyebrow.

He’s hauntingly beautiful. Terrifying.

I won’t lose my nerve.

“You can’t be seen in public. At least promise me that. They’ll take you back to that place.” My protectiveness of him pushes through the sex haze. That’s what I was angry about all along. Not that he forced me. That he hurt

me. I like that. What pisses me off is how careless he's being. How he'll ruin his life again because of me. Again. "Where do you even sleep?"

Sticking to his silence, he shakes his head.

"You owe me answers." I lean up another inch.

He pushes me back to the bed, his hand flat on my chest. "Tomorrow."

"What happens tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow." He gets up, grabbing something from his jeans. One of my black thongs. It looks used, and I gasp, knowing exactly why.

"What's tomorrow?" It's the more important question.

One he won't answer.

Kaleb bites my thong. Shrugs into his clothes. His boots.

Everything he has on looks new.

Where did he get it from? It's imperative that I have this piece of information. Without it, how can I protect him?

I jump out of bed, gripping the sleeve of his hoodie. "This isn't funny. You getting caught isn't fucking funny to me, Kaleb."

Tilting his head, he takes my thong out of his mouth. "You see me laughing?"

"No."

His lips press together. His jaw works.

"What?" I ask.

He huffs, pulling me into him. Locking me in his arms.

It's the strongest hug. The warmest embrace.

It's over way too soon.

"I'm fine." He tucks a strand of my hair behind my ear. My scar is on the other side. I'm grateful that he doesn't see it. Not tonight when everything's volatile. When he's such an enigma to me. He'll demand answers while still not giving me any, and I won't have that. "Don't worry about me."

"I do worry." Eleven years. That's how long I've been worrying over him. Over a goddamn decade.

Now he's back. He promised he'd stay. Except he's leaving. Why?

"Please, stay."

While I look at him—while I beg—he shoves my thong between my legs, rolling it from my slit upward. "Mmm."

His touch and the satisfied sound are my undoing. My knees buckle and he hooks his arm around me, holding me upward with my thong in his hand

while he leans over to pick his mask off the floor behind him. He's strong enough to do both. Tall enough to reach.

"Go to bed." He pulls it on, my monster. "I'm not going anywhere. I'm not done with you. I'll never be done with you. I won't leave you a second time. That's a promise. But we're playing a game and it won't be over until I say so."

I open my mouth to argue, to demand that he spend the night. To beg him to stay with me.

Despite everything, I don't want him to leave me ever again.

He won't let me. There's no arguing with him when he presses a finger to my lips. When he renders me silent by stuffing my soaked thong into his mask.

We're both silent after that. As he helps me into the bed. As he stuns me further by going to my bathroom and returning with a cloth, wiping me clean.

I reach out to him when he pulls the covers over me. He only shakes his head.

One last look, and he's gone.

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14

SHILOH

"Mr. Ronan Talbot's office, how may I help you?"

Confusion hits hard. I'm quiet, needing a second to regroup. Just one so I can come to my senses and snap my mouth shut.

When I manage, I put my coffee mug on the kitchen counter, the second one for today. I really needed that one. Kaleb wore me out last night. Physically and emotionally. I'm still sore between my legs. Still unsure of what happened.

Many things did. If I had to sum them up in one word, it'd be a firework.

Thing is, one word isn't enough.

Sadness, there's also that.

The reason I'm on my second coffee before school is that I woke up extra early today. As early as possible, so I could head over to the nearest pharmacy and get Plan B.

It hurt my soul to swallow it.

If we survive the games he has planned for us, we'll have a million babies together. I want them. Want his babies.

If we survive the games he has planned for us, we'll have them.

This isn't the right time. I have frozen fingers hidden in my freezer. I'm aiding a fugitive who happens to be my stepbrother.

I'm working my fucking hardest to convince him to stay safe.

I thought I owed Kaleb my life. I was wrong. I owe him everything. And it starts with this sacrifice.

Me getting pregnant would only distract him. He'd fret over me, then he'd make mistakes.

He'd get caught.

As much as my heart shriveled when I swallowed that pill, I knew I had to.

I refused to be the reason they'd send him back to Berkshire.

Sigh.

Wherever he is, I hope for his sake that he's keeping a low profile.

I'll kill him if he isn't.

I need him alive. Here. With me.

I wouldn't have called my monster of a father otherwise.

If anyone could call off the cops or even the FBI, it's Dad. I'll convince him. Sell him on the idea that it'll work for his benefit as well.

Get the authorities off Kaleb's back and let me go with him somewhere. Anywhere where we won't be an *embarrassment*.

Hidden. Anonymous.

My murderous stepbrother and I.

I'll continue my education and Kaleb will do…

Anything he likes. He'll have his freedom.

We'll figure it out.

Focus.

Right. This phone call. That was what I was pissed about before my head started going in a million directions.

The reminder has my nails digging into my palm. It has me seeing red.

I didn't call his office. I called him.

Meaning he changed his personal number and forwarded these calls to his office.

Without telling me. I bet he laughed when he came up with the idea. Another way of making me feel small and inconsequential.

It won't work.

Bastard.

"Hello?" a woman whose voice I don't recognize, no doubt his newest assistant, says. "Anyone there?"

My lips twist. I barely contain a rude answer she doesn't deserve.

Dad's the problem, not her.

Yet here I am, on the verge of snapping at her.

After last night, who could blame me?

Kaleb ruined me in a good way. In the best one. He made me cry. He brought on pain. He took without permission or care.

Kaleb's marks on my breasts are the most beautiful things I've seen. This gift he's given me, on top of the severed fingers.

His methods of healing and claiming me are intense. But he didn't leave before he built me back up.

Unlike some other people who never gave a fuck about me.

An undercurrent of violence runs beneath my skin. It grows as I imagine impaling my dad's head on a stick.

Wow.

"I'm ending the call now," the woman warns.

I take a deep breath as I tell the woman, "You're sure Mr. Talbot would approve of you hanging up on his daughter?"

"His daughter?" Fingers click on the keyboard. A triumphant humph follows. "That means you're Shiloh. Yes."

Her condescending tone gets to me.

Instead of telling her where she can stick it, I count to ten while looking down at my outfit for the day.

A black wool dress that falls just over my ankles. Fishnet tights. Black leather combat boots. A dark-gray peacoat. There's no one to impress today but myself, and yeah, I'm fucking impressed.

My father, on the other hand, would've had a coronary.

When I wore something similar to my BA graduation ceremony, he said, *"What the hell is this? Extremely unprofessional, Shiloh. Go back and change."*

I didn't. Kaleb's mom always puts on the outfits he chooses for her, though. I haven't seen her wearing anything comfortable, like sweats or pajama pants, in my life.

He'd reward her with appreciative looks. No compliments or anything. Lingering stares and solemn nods. Which, in my dad's case, equals the highest praise.

She's okay with being his pretty doll on strings. He's paying her for it.

All I've ever wanted from him was my freedom.

I'm so close to having it.

I smile down at my clothes. At my little rebellion.

I need to look put together enough for the practice hours today, and I'm pretty sure I've nailed it.

Fuck Dad and his approval.

My smile widens. Kaleb wouldn't mind my clothes. I bet he'd enjoy tearing them off me.

He'd enjoy destroying my clothes, not me.

Dad lied when he said Kaleb would kill me for no reason whatsoever.

When Kaleb kills people, he does it for a reason. I've learned that over the past two days. He kills them to help me. To be with me.

I deserted Kaleb. Cursed him and told him I hated him.

He hurt me in return. He loved me, anyway.

We *will* be together. That's why I'm doing this. For him. For us.

I lift my chin in my empty apartment. "Yes, this is she."

"I'm glad." She sounds pleased. Too pleased. "I've been waiting for your call."

My hackles rise almost immediately. "Why's that? Dad's been looking for me?"

I had no missed calls. Then again, Kaleb was here. He could've deleted them.

Hot.

"Your father is currently in a meeting."

A loaded pause.

Again, strange. "Okay. So take a message."

"No, I won't. I do, however, have a message for you." She clears her throat. "He suspected you'd call and asked that I relay it since he won't be talking to you directly until further notice."

That fucker. He knew I'd ask him to help Kaleb.

This is how he hurts both of us.

The nerve of him, to resent *me*. Despite his never-ending brainwashing, despite keeping me away from Berkshire.

Despite my endless questions when I was younger.

Is he okay?

Did he ask for visitors? They won't let him have any? Maybe you could try?

All I ever got was *no. No. No.* Sometimes it was *Go to your room.*

Other times, he'd use the belt.

Kaleb's mom would eat or drink and nod absently as the abuse went on.

Until I stopped asking about Kaleb. Until I started to think he was really dangerous to me.

“I’d rather he called me back.” The clock in my kitchen ticks, reminding me that I have to leave for school in thirty minutes if I don’t want to be late. That I should hurry to avoid reaching into the phone and murdering this lady. “What’s your name, anyway?”

“Eden. Listen, Miss Talbot. I won’t lose my job over this,” she snaps, talking quickly. I can’t get a word in. “Here is his exact message, in his own words: *I paid off the independent reporter who had been snooping around your apartment building. He shouldn’t be an issue anymore. In case Kaleb drops by, I expect you to call me at this number immediately. I’ll handle it privately before you cause a pseudo-incestuous scandal, which I’m sure you’ve been after for years. You’ll pay for it if you don’t call when he comes. I won’t tolerate disobedience on your part. I’ll be in touch when you’re needed*.”

I clutch onto the edge of the kitchen counter, my knuckles turning white.

I’m speechless after hearing the fucked-up message from his assistant.

His assistant!

An email would’ve been less insulting.

An email wouldn’t have been as cruel.

How dare he call Kaleb names when he’s the worst of them all.

When he plans on ruining my stepbrother.

He could give up Kaleb’s location to the cops if he finds him. He’d emphasize how dangerous he is. Lie by telling them he’d been threatening us. They’d kill him on sight for that.

Dad would be ruining Kaleb when he should be compensating him.

I hate myself. I was foolish to hope he’d grow a conscience. That he’d just want this to go away.

He’s past that.

The only place he’ll be sending my stepbrother off to is an early grave.

I’ll have to handle it myself, then.

It’ll be hard. Kaleb is stubborn as fuck. As ruthless as the devil.

I’ll deal with him. I’ve got this.

No one, and I mean no one, will take him from me.

My lips curl in a sneer I don’t recognize. My heart hardens against the world.

This isn’t over.

“Fine.” I end the call before she becomes imaginative and starts throwing insults of her own.

I’ll figure out on my own how I can graduate faster and how Kaleb and I can survive without Dad’s money. Both will happen.

I’ll make it happen.

For any of that to happen, I have to be smart about it.

I will.

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15

SHILOH

I've spent the past three hours looking through the one-way window of Professor Dempsey's clinic. Observing his practice sessions with two different, older students that I don't recognize. A man and a woman. The woman joined Dempsey for two sessions, the man for one. I don't remember their names. Don't care to know them.

The sessions. I care about those. I've been paying attention to them and not much else.

Each one of them went something like this: Professor Dempsey introduced himself three times, listened to the new volunteers, and took notes. He encouraged the student at his side to ask questions and either approved of them or gently corrected them.

Throughout the entire time I've watched him, he's been professional.

A teacher.

It's my turn to learn now.

The other students wait for my practice out here with me and Eddy. They're huddled together, ignoring my existence.

The most recent volunteer leaves through the designated guest door on the other side of the clinic.

"Eddy," Professor Dempsey calls from within the clinic. "Come here for a sec."

Without sparing a glance my way, Eddy rushes to join him.

I'm close to snapping at him for being so over the top. He's been that way for the last three hours, and I just don't get it.

But I say nothing.

I need to be here.

My teacher gestures toward his laptop, and Eddy leans in. He must be showing him the photo and information about the next volunteer. It's a requirement, I was told. Proof that the volunteer isn't pranking us.

Eddy's face goes white. His lips move in the shape of a "yes." He straightens and returns to us, his fingers hooking into the collar of his teal sweatshirt as he tugs at it.

Then he beckons me away from the other students, his lips quivering.

"Shiloh," he whispers once I'm close enough.

"Yes?"

"About…" He leaves the sentence hanging in the air.

He's wearing a white T-shirt under his sweatshirt. His face has just turned a shade paler.

I swear, he better not start bitching about Kaleb again.

Today has been exhausting. It's been wearing me thin.

Blowing Val off over text messages was hard. *I swear I'm okay. I need to deal with it on my own for a little while. We'll attend the funeral together when a date is set. I'll be safe. Promise.*

The fake concern was a necessary evil. Didn't mean I had to like it. It pained me, and yet I never hesitated.

Kaleb had to be protected at all costs. Kaleb was mine.

The pain from last night, the passion. The taking. Something snapped inside of me and I accepted every bit of it. Every bit of him.

My soul is drawn to his darkness and obsession. To him.

To the man who watched me throughout the day.

My mind couldn't rest.

A nagging worry constantly attacked the butterflies in my stomach incessantly.

He'd been out here, on campus, where he could be seen. Someone might've recognized him.

I couldn't go looking for him to tell him to quit stalking. To go into hiding.

Dad's assistant basically admitted that he hired someone to watch me.

So no incriminating Kaleb by searching for him.

It didn't stop me from freaking out, though. Worrying about him was making me crazy. Worst part is, it turned me on just the same. I'm still so

fucking hot for his sick cat-and-mouse games.

I might end up killing him for this. All of this.

Who am I fucking kidding? I would never, ever kill him.

That doesn't mean I can't hurt him. Just like he hurt me. How he made me learn my lesson. I have a few things to teach him, too.

Right after I figure out what the hell Eddy wants. "What is it this time?"

"I—you—the next—" he stutters and stops.

My jaw tics. My hands press to my waist, digging into the thick fabric of my coat.

I tilt my head, and somehow, Eddy's face turns even paler. I can practically see through his skin. He takes a hesitant step back, scratching his chest.

"I'm sorry." The other students are busy chatting behind me. They don't hear him whisper. "I'm sorry, Shiloh. For what I said yesterday. Please, I apologize. Profusely. I was wrong to say those things. Really wrong."

What's gotten into him? We settled this yesterday.

Unless… "Did you tell anyone about our conversation? Am I going to get kicked out of school for being Kaleb's sister?"

"No, no." His eyebrows shoot up, then down. His pupils are huge. "As I said. I was wrong. You're always welcome here."

That's the one thing I care about.

My teacher might be a perv. Given my dad's determination to ruin us, my days in this college are probably numbered.

But I need this one-on-one, or more like two-on-one practice.

The theories in our books have failed to help me. Kaleb—as much as he'd like to believe he has it all figured out—doesn't have all the answers.

Talking to actual people who don't have a picture-perfect life, seeing the world through their eyes, this is it. This is my last resort.

When I'm miles away from here and Kaleb needs me, or when I get lost in my own head, I'll remember this day. I'll remember how to handle challenging situations.

"Okay, sure. I forgive you." I don't sound too convincing. Eddy is on my shitlist. There's no coming back from it. "Can I go inside already?"

He pinches his trembling lips, sucking in a breath through his nose. "Was that the plan all along?"

"Yes." Why is he fucking with me? What am I here for if not to practice? "Professor Dempsey promised I could sit in on this last one." My

eyebrows lower and my voice takes on a deadly twist. A Kaleb kind of twist. The way he'd talk to my father. "Are you sure you didn't say anything?"

"Nothing, nothing." His hands snap up to hide his face. "Don't hurt me."

Would you look at that? Two nights with Kaleb, and I already give off serial killer vibes.

Mission accomplished.

So that Eddy won't die of a heart attack on the spot, I add, "No one's going to hurt you. As long as you talk about Kaleb respectfully, you're safe. Don't, and I'll hunt you down. I'll make your life miserable. You can count on that."

"I won't." His voice breaks. He takes a step back. "I won't."

"Good, then you have nothing to worry about."

"S-swear it, Shiloh. Give me your word that I won't be harmed."

Next thing he'll do, he'll ask for a pinky promise. The clock inside the clinic says it's five to eight. The volunteer patient should be here any minute and I'm here wasting time.

On Eddy.

I have to do this, or he'll start screaming and ruin everything. "I swear."

"On your life."

My pocketknife is hidden in the pocket of my dress. I'm tempted to break my vow to Eddy and kill him for being such a pain. For taking forever.

"On my life."

"Awesome. T-thanks." He moves aside, gesturing for me to head inside the clinic through the main door. The volunteers enter through a separate entrance to avoid passing through the other students. They're aware they're there, it's just that there's no need to make them feel weird about it. "He's waiting for you. The volunteer's name is Jakob White. With a K."

He emphasizes the name, giving me a meaningful look. He's sending me a message, one I would decipher. If I had the time and desire to do so.

Since I never heard of this person in my life and I'm anxious to get in, I nod at a trembling Eddy.

"Jakob White with a K, gotcha." I'm headed to the door, walking past Eddy, who starts backing up toward the door leading to the hallway. "Hey," I whisper. "I said I wouldn't hurt you."

“Stomach bug.” He wraps one arm around it. His free hand grips his shoulder bag tight. “Sorry. Tell Joe—Professor Dempsey—tell him I’m off for the night.”

“Um. Okay.” The responsible thing would be to tell him himself, but I’m not Eddy’s keeper.

The students behind me huddle and murmur things to each other as I put my hand on the handle. I hear *Lucky* and *Is she seriously his taste?*

They think I slept my way to the top to get where I am today. They believe I haven’t worked my ass off for years.

Assholes.

It’s a comforting thought, knowing that I could ask Kaleb to kill them. That he’d do it in a heartbeat.

He could get caught.

Because of me. Again.

Over my dead body.

Ignoring their hateful comments, I push the door open.

Professor Dempsey gets up from his gray armchair. His light gray slacks and white dress shirt aren’t what he typically wears to class.

He’s going for the therapist look.

An impression he has to ruin with a slimy smile that has my stomach roiling.

“Miss Talbot.” He clasps his hands in front of him. “I saved the best for last.”

The best patient, you mean. Stop staring at me like that.

“Hi.” I stare right into his blue eyes. “Thank you for having me.”

“Of course. I’ll get Mr. White.” He twists to the other door, and in a few steps, he’s there, pulling it open. “Come in, Mr. White.”

“Thanks,” the other man says.

You have got to be kidding me.

That voice.

No. No, no, no.

I must be imagining this.

I have to be imagining this.

Professor Dempsey steps aside, gesturing for the volunteer to come in.

A volunteer who happens to be my stepbrother.

He walks in, his gait long and confident. Staring at me from behind his mask.

My eyes fly open. My heart ceases to work.

It's as if I've been punched.

As if someone's burning me alive.

This is the most upset I've ever been. Most angry.

A scream lodges in my throat, and I swallow it. If I let it out, if I howl my frustration at Kaleb, the sound will be so loud that it'll tear the building down.

It all makes sense now. Jakob with a fucking K.

Eddy wasn't afraid of me out there. He saw the picture of the volunteer. Kaleb must have had his mask on and Eddy put two and two together.

He figured out it was Kaleb. He must've thought I'd encouraged him to come here. To hurt Eddy for the things he'd said about him.

I most certainly did not.

What the fuck! The scream I let out in my head hurts my ears. *Putting yourself out there for the world to see? What. The. Fuck.*

Yes, the mask hides his true identity. Yes, no one here or anywhere has heard my stepbrother's voice. He never spoke to the press. They wouldn't recognize his voice.

The mask, though. His massive size.

The things he might reveal during the session.

Anyone here might recognize him.

Slim chance of that happening. Slim, yet possible.

Damn it. Damn him.

As we stand there, the three of us, I gape at him. It's all I can do to stay in place, or else I'll throttle him. I'll punch him for this sick game.

I'll cut him, just enough to make him bleed, but not actually damage him.

And he'll probably get turned on by that, bend me over one of the chairs, and fuck me for the world to see.

The thought sends heat to my pussy, which is terrible.

What the fuck, Kaleb?

Our sick, twisted games aren't worth it. Nothing's worth having him taken back to Berkshire or worse.

Dead.

I'm so mad I could cry. Scream. Stomp my feet like I'm eleven all over again.

"Miss Talbot?" Professor Dempsey's voice is reproachful.

I’m gawking at our volunteer.

I swallow past the lump in my throat. Blink back tears.

Then, I offer my stepbrother my hand. “Sorry about that. Nice to meet you, Mr. White. Thank you for coming.”

“Miss Talbot.” Kaleb takes my hand, the reckless bastard, stroking my wrist with his thumb. One swipe that sends shivers up my spine. “Thank you for having me.”

I swear, if I didn’t love him so much, I’d slaughter him.

Instead, I take a seat, resting my hand on top of the pocket where I keep my knife.

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16

KALEB

Bound. Screaming. Crying. Panting for me.

Every time I rubbed one out at Berkshire, that was my fantasy. That was how I wanted Shiloh. That was how I had her.

This moment, though. This fucking moment.

When she sits cross-legged like this, her dress rises, revealing a hint of her fishnets.

She shrugged off her coat and draped it over the back of her chair earlier, and I can't get enough of how her black dress hugs her soft curves. Her blazer hugs her body in a way that accentuates her breasts, a mouthwatering sight.

But her clothes aren't what makes me painfully hard.

It's her reaction to me.

Her pulse is loud enough for me to hear all the way from here, where I sit across from her.

Her blue eyes are wild. Rage bursts through them.

Hands clamped on the armrests.

The vein in her neck throbs.

Fury.

Delicious, untamed, and unhinged fury.

It's rolling off her. Splashing in rough strokes all over this bland, boring clinic.

So boring. In fact, I've never been to a more boring place in my life.

A therapist's practice is supposed to be a calming space for the patient. Being Dr. Reynolds's patient for years has taught me that.

Calming, not sleep-inducing.

It's like they want their volunteers to fall asleep here.

Gray walls. Gray chairs. Cheap gray desk. Even the man who dared—*fuck, I can't kill him, not right away*—touch Shiloh wears gray slacks.

Don't get me started on the pathetic one-way mirror.

Without Shiloh here, I might've dozed off the second my ass landed in the chair.

Then again, I would've never come here if it weren't for her.

"Mr. White, may I call you Jakob?" the asshole sitting to her right asks.

My eyes never leave hers. I'm soaking up this moment. This torture. This taunting. I'm a starved man, and her labored breaths are my favorite meal.

"Mr. White?" She seethes, jaw working. "You're here to talk, aren't you? Then talk."

Her loser professor coughs. His pen drops to the floor with a *clank*.

"Or would you rather be silent in the privacy of your own home?" Shiloh ignores the commotion to her side, leaning forward in her chair. Her hair drapes over her front. The look she's pinning me with is feral. I'm going to devour her whole. "Hmm?"

"Miss Talbot, please slow down." In my periphery, I catch him turning to me. "My apologies, Mr. White. She's our youngest student. If you're uncomfortable, we can ask her to step out."

My silent glower behind the mask is all the answer I give him.

I dare you to kick her out of here. I'd kill you on the spot.

He doesn't see my expression.

He senses it just fine. His face blanches with apprehension.

"She stays. Of course she stays." He lifts his hands in a peaceful gesture. Bends to the floor to grab his pen and clears his throat. "You're the patient; you get to have the first, last, and only say in this."

My own slow nod feels like I've offered him more than he deserves.

"Mr. White—"

"Jakob," I bark at him. I'm getting bored with this *Mr.* shit.

I want to get to the good stuff already.

"Jakob." There's a smile in his voice. Shiloh isn't smiling. She presses her lips together. "Would you like to discuss what's brought you here?

Since Miss Talbot wasn't privy to our email correspondence."

Her spine straightens. Eyes growing impossibly wider.

It's obvious what's bothering her.

She doesn't care about her classes or her college professor.

She worries too much. About me.

You can't be seen in public. They'll take you back to that place.

I like that. That she's protective of me.

The tension vibrating from her is addictive. Especially when it comes in the form of fire and brimstone. Of hate and anger.

She'd never been that way during the five months we lived together.

She must've never been this mad, ever.

She has no idea how to handle this level of fury. Or me, since she's only been acquainted with this version of her stepbrother for two days.

And it's killing her. The constant shifting in her chair. The flaring nostrils.

She's so consumed by it that she's forgotten where she is.

Any minute now, she'll leap out of her chair and choke me.

I cock my head, daring her to do it. It'd be entertaining, and I'd leave here, taking her with me, before they start wondering who I really am.

Seconds tick by.

Her lips twist. A tiny snarl. A flash of her teeth.

Fuck, am I hard for her.

After sleeping the entire night with her soaked thong pressed to my nose, after stalking her from afar, I'm hanging by a thread.

Unfortunately, shoving my dick inside her right now will defeat the purpose of this game.

This elongated torture.

I can wait.

I have years of this to look forward to. Decades. I'll make it my life's mission to keep her on her toes. I'll destroy her sanity, methodically. Carefully. Just enough to drive her to the brink of madness and bring *this* look out of her.

"Obsessed with my mask." My explanation is clipped, my voice low as I stare at Shiloh. "Obsessed with my stepsister. That's why I'm here. I have issues."

"Is that so?" she starts, despite her professor's raised hand. "Issues? Is that what they call a person who's trying to self-sabotage himself?" When

she catches herself, she quickly adds, “Self-sabotaging, since you can’t think of anything other than your obsessions, I mean.”

“Miss Talbot.” Professor Asshole’s voice booms. I hear him tapping his pen in annoyance. As if either of us cares that he’s upset. “I’ll let you know when it’s your turn to conduct the interview and when your diagnosis is required. For the time being, you only listen.”

“Sorry.” Her blue eyes spit flames. She isn’t sorry at all.

Just how I love her.

“Jakob.” My fake name on his lips barely registers. He clears his throat, a sign that he wants my attention. He’ll regret it later. I twist my head to him, and his lips tick upward. Idiot. “At what age did you first start noticing these compulsions?”

When Dad started beating the shit out of me, I needed my mask. Needed to be gone from this stupid world that had nothing to offer me.

When Shiloh turned eighteen, and I couldn’t help but take my cock out and jerk off until cum covered my hand down to my wrist.

That’s when I noticed my obsession with her.

And though I haven’t mentioned my murderous needs, I have an answer for that, too.

I hadn’t been like the other kids in kindergarten or school. Heck, I wasn’t anything like anyone at Berkshire. I’d spent years suppressing my desire to slaughter people. Silent, since talking to people has always been a waste of breath. No one interested me enough to put in the effort.

No one got in the way.

But when someone did…

Professor Dipshit won’t be hearing any of it, though.

What I have to say, what I want Shiloh to hear, is a simple enough answer. “Years ago. And every day since. Every minute.”

“Fascinating.” No idea what’s fascinating about six words that mean nothing to him.

Maybe it isn’t what I’m saying. It’s what I am. A grown man wearing a mask. On the month of Halloween, but still. I stand out. Dr. Reynolds made sure to emphasize that during our sessions at Berkshire.

“You care deeply for your mask, that much is obvious.” He pauses, seeking my approval. I huff. “Your stepsister, though. How has that obsession been manifesting itself?”

By putting my dick in her virgin, dubiously willing cunt. By forcing her to come.

“I stalk her.” I shrug.

This is more information than Dr. Reynolds ever got.

It enrages Shiloh that I’m divulging it here. All these clues that I’m dropping.

Her breaths get louder. I hear her fingernails scratching the fabric of the armrests.

Hot, but not as hot as the sounds that came out of her when she gagged on my cock.

“How?” she snaps, and it’s sweet how she unravels for me. “How could you have possibly stalked her when you weren’t—”

“Final warning, Miss Talbot.” He covers her hand.

His hand.

Is.

On.

Hers.

A brief touch that snuffs out my amusement. My teeth bite down on my tongue to take the edge off. I won’t last long.

“You mentioned in your email that you’ve been away for years.” His hand is back in his lap. The urge to chop it off him makes my head throb. “The stalking must be a new escalation, then.”

“No.” I’m bored with hearing him blabber, so I guess what his next question will be and answer it myself. For her. All of this is for her to learn more about me. While we’re playing. “I hired a man. Didn’t have much to offer him in exchange for her pictures, mainly, and her addresses as she moved around the country. A syringe, too. He asked for a favor in return. He’s still waiting for me to cash it in.”

She’s expressive, my stepsister. Her eyebrows shoot up, then her eyes narrow as understanding dawns on her. She opens her mouth. Thinks better of it. Slams it shut.

“I have to ask.” Douchebag’s tone turns concerned. He puts down the pen, crossing one ankle over his knee. “Is your stepsister in any kind of immediate danger now that you’re home? Are you planning to harm her in any way?”

Yes, and yes. She loves it. “No, and no.”

My attention is on Shiloh, only her.

Her arms are folded under her chest, pressing her breasts together. They're big and hot, and if I took her dress off right now, I'd see my bite marks on them.

My cock is about to tear a hole through my jeans.

"That's reassuring."

My eyes snap to him. What kind of psychologist is he? I just told him about acquiring a syringe, and he takes my word that Shiloh's safe at face value?

Good thing he's not going to live long. I never believed in therapists, but some people do. He was supposed to teach generations of future psychologists.

Imagine the damage he's doing.

My response isn't as elaborate. I hike up a shoulder.

Shiloh slams her hands on the armrests, hissing, "Oh my God."

Her professor pats her shoulder. Squeezes once.

Every nerve ending in my body centers around my fingers. They twitch and curl around the edge of the armrests.

Soon.

Soon.

I'm here for her. I get off on watching red splotches flare on Shiloh's cheeks. The rise and fall of her breasts.

A little more of this game. A few more minutes of agony.

Then my fingers will be free to destroy the man who's touching and harassing what's mine.

"She won't be safe for long." I dip my chin, zooming in on Shiloh's face. Reveling in her glower. "She'll be ruined once I get my hands on her. When the time is right, I'll be there to mess her up. Own her. For fucking ever."

"Dating her." The professor turns my words into something they aren't. "That's good. That's a step up from stalking."

My fucking God. He's so determined to keep me here that he's willing to dismiss my threat. All for the sake of science.

Science and morbid curiosity.

Shiloh doesn't give a fuck about science. I'm the one she cares about. I'm the one she's mad at for being reckless. For my sick ways of entertaining myself. Of seducing her.

She mouths, *Stop it.*

The slight shake of my head makes her hands clench and unclench.

She sucks her lips in. I crave to force myself between them. Sink every inch of my cock down her throat while she moans around me. While her voice reverberates on my length.

“Glad you approve,” I huff, pointing a finger at the little hurricane that’s about to swallow the entire room inside it. I mean Shiloh. “Her turn to ask me questions.”

“Okay, okay.” The pervert’s good-natured expression doesn’t fool me.

The kids I slaughtered to avenge Shiloh were preppy. Wore suits to the police station. Smiled as they explained they were just *messing around*, and that Shiloh couldn’t take a joke. High-fived each other when Mr. Talbot said, *Let’s keep this between us and call it a day*.

“Miss Talbot, you’re up.” He looks at her and I’m two seconds from tearing his leery eyes out. “Start slow. Safe. Okay?”

“Okay.” The word is a whip. “Jakob.”

The man who’s putting everything on the line to have her.

Her stepbrother who’s crazy about her.

“Yes, Miss Talbot?”

“I understand that your obsessions are intense.” She’s treading lightly, yet her voice trembles with anger. Her body is wound tight. “That they take over your life.”

“Yes.” I would’ve nodded to most people. Not Shiloh.

I want to talk to her. Fight her. Get under her skin. Deeper than I already have.

“Hmm.” Her hum is barely audible, but the anger is there. Live and fiery in the small *hmm*.

“Hmm,” I parrot.

“To the point that…” Her chest expands. Rage swells within her. Whatever thunderstorm’s building up inside her, it’s about to unleash itself. On me. Fuck, it’ll be good. Fuck, I’m throbbing for it. “To the point of wanting”—her voice rises to a shriek in a matter of one single second—“to kill yourself? Is that where you’re going with this?”

“Shiloh!” Professor Pervert shouts, standing up.

He has no idea. No fucking clue that she’s not talking about suicide.

Shiloh is sweet and caring. Shiloh has loved me from the very beginning.

She understood me when no one else would.

My mask. My silence. The wall I've built around myself.

She would never suggest that anyone kill themselves, least of all me.

What she means is the risk I'm taking. That I might be signing my death sentence just by being here.

The stakes are too high.

I'm not going anywhere.

Whether she likes it or not.

Her pent-up anger has detonated, and it's so motherfucking pretty.

"My office." Professor Motherfucker throws his arm in the direction of the visitor's door. "Now."

If that's where he wants to spend his last minutes, well then.

His funeral.

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17

SHILOH

The walk to Professor Dempsey's office is long. At least it feels like it.

The halls are dark and quiet in the nearly empty building.

He and I are the only two people here. The other students stayed behind the one-way mirror. Eddy is long gone.

Kaleb's there, still. He didn't walk out of the clinic when we did.

Goddamn him.

Rage simmers in my blood all over again. It's never really left, has it?

I'm drowning in it. So much so that it pushes out the shame over my tantrum. The fear of being expelled. The unease of being close—too close—to my teacher who touched me yesterday.

I wish I could double back and run to the clinic. Fish out my pocketknife. Stab my stepbrother so he'll realize how insane he's making me.

I'll carve my name into his arm. His stomach.

Nothing major. Nothing that'll cause him to bleed out. But I need this outlet.

I'm a wild animal, and it's his fault. He's the one who has to help me climb down this madness tree.

What was he thinking?

What were you *thinking?*

I was thinking of him alone in the psychiatric hospital. Of me getting kicked out of the only home I've ever known, without a chance to tell Kaleb

goodbye.

I thought about missing him. About my guilt.

About how I can't let it happen a second time.

I don't care that he kills people. I don't care that he's into sick games. That he's not great at listening to me.

I. Don't.

Except Eddy realized who he was. Others could have, too.

Police sirens. My stepbrother being hauled away.

Away from me.

"Inside." Professor Dempsey is already at the threshold, the light in his office turned on. His face betrays nothing as he holds his arm out. "This minute, Shiloh."

A heaved sigh slips past my lips. Which is bad. The last thing I need is for this might-be predator to think that I'm weak.

Kaleb must've left by now. He had to have realized how dangerous it would be to stay. I hope he did. I'll be really, really fucking angry if he didn't.

I still wish he were here so I wouldn't feel so defeated.

Even with the knife that's within arm's reach. Even with my coat that I shrugged on as another layer of safety between me and my teacher.

If Kaleb were here, Professor Dempsey wouldn't dare touch me. Wouldn't dare threaten my future here, and ask for—

Stop it, Shiloh.

I'm overreacting. Adrenaline swarms my blood. It explains the feral reaction. The extreme scenarios in my head.

Professor Dempsey might give me a slap on the wrist and send me off.

Yeah, he might.

"Okay." Shoulders squared. Long gait. I walk into his office, where I met him before the practice sessions started.

He was decent then. Let me leave my bag on the hanger by the door. Didn't look at me like he wanted to eat me up.

Then again, Eddy was here.

Don't think like that. You have your pocketknife on you and…Just don't.

The click of the door closing echoes loudly in my ears. I keep my eyes firm on the floor-to-ceiling paned windows behind my teacher's desk. On the dimly lit gardens up ahead.

I force myself to stop biting my bottom lip.

“What happened today was unacceptable.” He’s at my side, anyway. I turn to him and look up.

He’s too close. Again. Close enough that I smell cigar smoke and leather. That I see his blue eyes have turned wicked.

“You requested a complex case.” He leans over, inching toward me. “You said you could do it.”

“Yes.”

“Then what the fuck was that back there?”

I’m a lousy liar. A terrible one.

Anything I say might suggest that I know Kaleb. Even if my teacher doesn’t watch the news and hasn’t heard about my case, he will start looking into it once he suspects me.

A thorough internet search, paying off some people, and *bam*.

He could either blackmail Kaleb into being his test subject. The *freak* he could write a thesis or a book about.

Or he could do *the right thing* and call the authorities.

“I’m sorry.” If I sound honest, it’s because I am.

I’m sorry that I fucked up the chance he’d given me. Sorry that I embarrassed myself in front of the other students.

Most of all, I’m sorry that Kaleb likes me. That he risked his freedom to play mind games with me. I’m not worthy of all his pain.

Not an ounce of it.

My shoulders slump.

“Not good enough.” He lifts a hand. I shove mine into my dress pocket, locking it around the knife.

“I guess I wasn’t as prepared as I thought,” I say, changing the subject so he won’t catch me in a lie.

When he drops his hand, I think I’ve made it. That he’ll tell me to leave and think about what I’ve done in the privacy of my own home.

“Not good enough, either.”

He backs up, perching his ass on his desk.

Then I see it.

The bulge in his pants.

Shit. Fuck.

Bastard.

First thing I do is snap my gaze back up to his face and hold my chin high. “What will be good enough?”

“I could have you kicked out for the little stunt you just pulled.” He crosses his arms over his chest.

“Please, don’t.”

Don’t give my father an excuse to say I’ve lost it and commit me to a psychiatric hospital. Please.

“Your daddy made a significant contribution to this college, but…” he trails off.

The hair on the back of my neck stands on end.

It has nothing to do with my professor’s lingering threat.

It has everything to do with Kaleb. He’s here. An invisible shadow.

My protector.

But where?

Without raising Professor Dempsey’s suspicions, I avert my gaze once again to the gardens. The grass, trees, and paved paths are bathed in soft, low lights. Barely visible since the campus street lamps are few and far between.

The presence I’m sensing is out there, I’m sure of it.

Yes, here he is. I see him.

At first, he’s just a black smudge in the distance, approaching Professor Dempsey’s office. Slowly.

Why?

Couldn’t he see how angry I was? How freaked out?

That I worried for him?

I think he did. I think he sensed that I’d need him too.

My heart flutters in my chest. For a moment. That’s all I allow myself. I can’t focus on him.

I have to protect myself from my professor. He wants to hurt me. To assault me.

“But…” he says. “There’s another option.”

“Please.” We both know what I’m asking for. We both know I’m begging him not to reveal what’s waiting behind door number two. “Please. It doesn’t have to be that way.”

“You seem to be having trouble taking orders today, so let me be very clear.” His hands move to his belt. I refuse to fidget or take a step back when he unbuckles it. Fuck. Him. “You either get on your knees and suck me off, or it’s goodbye for you. Not just to this place. I’ll make calls. I

know people. It’ll be really fucking hard for you to get accepted anywhere else. My connections are stronger than your daddy’s money.”

They aren’t.

He’s nowhere near as wealthy or influential as my dad is. He doesn’t own a million start-up companies nor is he basically richer than God.

Except Dad won’t help me. He didn’t help the first time.

No point in running, either. He’ll catch me. “I’ll say you threatened to rape me.”

“After that tantrum you threw in there?” He scoffs. He laughs at me. “Sweetheart, I have witnesses. Students who will testify that you lost it. You were warned and, still, you basically attacked our volunteer. I had to expel you, and now you’re crying rape.”

The shadowy figure draws closer. Close enough that I can tell he’s as tall as six-foot-five. Close enough to see he’s holding a hammer-shaped object up. He must’ve run off to his car to get it and now he’s here.

Dressed in dark jeans, a black hoodie, wearing his mask.

Kaleb is back.

Protectiveness is a strong force. It stomps over my fear, eradicating it.

Don’t come in here, Kaleb. I’ve got this. For the love of God, go hide!

He won’t listen to my silent communication. He would’ve kept approaching even if I had screamed it in his face.

I’ll kill for him. Then I’ll kill him. No. I won’t, but fuck.

My pocketknife is hot in my palm. I won’t kill Kaleb, but I’ll kill Professor Dempsey before Kaleb does.

My teacher has no idea Kaleb is approaching. No clue that I’m gripping a knife.

He slides his belt out of the loops and slams it on the desk behind him.

A movement anyone looking into this lit room from the outside could see.

“Get out of here!” I shout for Kaleb’s sake. Dempsey can live or die for all I care. Kaleb, on the other hand, can’t be here. People might come in. Breaking the window will alert them that something’s wrong. They’ll come in here, and—Jesus. “Get the fuck out.”

“There you go again. Not paying attention.” My clueless professor has his hands on the button of his pants. The zipper rolls down next. “It’s obvious you haven’t been disciplined. It’s okay. I’m always up for a challenge.”

The shadow outside is closing in on us. He's less than six feet away. His gait is long. His hammer raised.

"Tell your father I accept checks and Venmo." He smirks, like sexual assault is the world's biggest joke.

He won't smile when I stab my knife down his throat. I have to do it. Me, not Kaleb. I'll say it was self-defense, that he tried to rape me. It'll look legit, with his belt off and his fly open. Dempsey's fingerprints will be on his clothes, a solid proof to back up my claims.

I just have to be faster than Kaleb.

That's the last thought I have before the window behind Professor Dempsey splinters under the weight of the hammer.

Dempsey turns around, hissing, "What the hell?" when Kaleb lands the second blow.

The one that shatters the window altogether. That blow breaks the glass enough for him to shoulder his way into Professor Dempsey's office.

"Leave, please," I whisper, careful not to say his name. I rush toward my teacher. My knife is slick with sweat. It keeps slipping from my hold. "Don't. Go."

"Back off. She didn't mean it." Dempsey thinks Kaleb is here for me. For retribution.

Kaleb isn't here for me. He was hard when I yelled at him. He loved it.

He's here for the man who took off his belt in front of me. Who touched me during our practice session.

He rounds the desk, almost here.

I should've been able to kill my flustered professor by now. But my damn hand is sweaty. Slippery.

There. I have a good grip on the handle.

"Your full name is on my laptop." Dempsey retreats, finally realizing he's the target here. "They'll find you. You won't get away with this."

It's too late for him to hide. Kaleb's large frame is towering over him. He tilts his head, looking at the belt. At the open fly. At me.

I'll do it, I mouth, walking up behind Dempsey.

He shakes his head. Once.

Bam!

The hammer bashes into Dempsey's forehead. The tip is planted into his skull. Blood trickles down his eyebrows, his wide eyes.

“Damn you,” I whisper-shout, slapping my hand over Dempsey’s mouth. If I couldn’t kill him, I might as well make myself useful by silencing his screams. “Kaleb, they’ll know. Fuck, why are you doing this?”

“He harassed you yesterday. And today.” He pulls the hammer out, then brings it down again. Dempsey collapses into me. “He touched you.” Another blow. “He was going to rape you.”

Dempsey’s a deadweight. His blood gushes onto my hand. When the cops come, I’ll say…I’ll say…

Fuck.

I’ll tell them that *Jakob White* did it. That’s it.

“I’m trying to protect you, Kaleb.” Angry tears roll down my cheeks. “Why won’t you let me?”

He stands there, hammer in his hand. “You’re hot when you’re all riled up.”

“Stop it.” I dump Dempsey’s lifeless body to the floor, stepping over him.

My bloodied hands flatten over Kaleb’s chest, pressing to his hoodie.

My pocketknife is jammed between us.

He doesn’t even notice it. Doesn’t care about the blood ruining his clothes.

“You’re lying. This isn’t about lust,” I say. “This isn’t about sex. You’re trying to get them to find you and leave me. I just—Why? Was I nothing more than a fuck to you, Kaleb? Was I?”

He cocks his head to the side, studying me.

“Well?” I’m crying. I’m pushing him back, though he won’t budge. For once, I wish I were bigger than him. Stronger. To force him into my car and out of this place. “Answer me, damn you.”

“I don’t know how to let you help me, little sister.” The hammer makes a dull sound as it lands on the floor. My pulse is getting louder. This is big, what he has to tell me. Huge. I can tell. “I’m the only person I could ever count on.”

The pain in my chest. It’s going to be the death of me. I put a hand to my mouth to silence my sobs. “I failed you. I should’ve spoken up. I should’ve gone against my father. I—Oh God. I’m so sorry.”

“Shh. There was nothing you could’ve done.” He raises his large hand to cup my cheek. Tucks my hair behind my ear.

On my wounded side.

I realize he’s noticed my scar as soon as Kaleb’s attention whips to the spot where my shoulder meets my back.

His frustrated groan freezes me in place.

The right thing to do would be to raise my voice, to tell him we need to get out of here.

Keep him safe.

Instead, I’m that eleven-year-old again. Hurt. Alone. Desperately needing to have someone on my side.

Him. I need him.

We’ll get out of here. He’ll be safe.

Later. Just after he’s done shoving the collar of my dress back. Just after he looks at my scar. That painful memory among many that I’ve been carrying throughout the years.

He’ll make it better for me.

Then we’ll leave.

His fingers are hot on my back where he grips the fabric of my dress. It’s as though all his rage concentrates there.

And his breaths, they’re heaved and ominous.

His last exhale before he tears the mask off his face is jagged.

His golden eyes are furious. Narrowed and full of fire as the mask falls to the floor.

One arm around my waist, the other hand on my chin, squeezing it as he’s tipping my head up.

“Shiloh.” One word that’s laden with promises. With death threats.

I won’t defend the undefendable, but this conversation needs to happen somewhere else.

“I—”

“‘I’ nothing,” he snaps. “Who did this to you?”

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18

KALEB

The last time my blood ran this hot was eleven years ago.

I resented and despised the way her dad shouted at her. His bullying and belittling of her.

Many nights, I'd lie in bed, fantasizing about killing him. Hands around his throat. Pushing his eyes back into his brain while he slept. Forcing my mother to defecate, then drowning him in her shit.

And every morning, I woke up different. I had a mission.

Killing him would've landed me in prison. Shiloh would've ended up in foster care.

So I had to stay. I had to protect her.

In the end, I couldn't save her from this.

This scar, in the shape of a belt, is the proof. It reaches down her back where her clothes hide it.

So even though I've got a good fucking guess who's responsible for it, I ask again.

"Answer me." I'm doing everything in my power not to shake her. Not to force the words out of her. I'm a ticking time bomb. I don't trust myself not to hurt her irreparably. "Answer me right the fuck now. Who did this to you?"

There are things to take care of. A body to hide. Fingerprints to wipe.

Nothing matters. Nothing.

That scar.

“Dad.” Tears rise to her eyes, stop there on her thick eyelashes. And here they are, cascading down her flushed cheeks. “I came home for the summer. That first year after you were gone. After you left me.”

The accusation is a slap to the face. I embrace it. I’ve earned it. “What did he do?”

“I kept asking about you. Over lunch. Dinner. Wouldn’t let it go.” Her lips pinch together. “My”—*sniff*—“fault.”

Pain slashes through my chest. Hearing how much she cared. How she was willing to face her dad for me.

She shouldn’t have.

I wasn’t there to protect her.

“It wasn’t your fault.” Pressing my thumb on her bottom lip, I order her, “Speak.”

“He lost it that evening. His chair fell to the floor when he got up.” She clings to me. I shouldn’t be turned on. Shouldn’t get off on being the fucked-up man she turns to—the man she wants. I am. “He pushed my cheek against my plate. Into the lasagna. He didn’t care that I cried and begged him to let me go. Your mom sat there and did nothing.”

I could leave right now. Walk out of here with her over my shoulder. Barge into our parents’ home and mash their faces in the garbage disposal and turn it on.

Without losing my grip on Shiloh.

Without waiting to listen to her whole story.

She needs me to. I made her start, and I’ll be here to hear her out.

Besides, I have other people to kill before I get to them. And I will.

Her dad’s private investigator lurks outside her home. That lazy fuck was there when I left this morning. After Shiloh drove off to school.

He’s there while we’re here. When I get home tonight, I’ll kill him. Then I’ll play with Shiloh some more until Halloween comes. Until I kill the people who brought us together.

One of the darkest nights of the year. Two of the cruelest people I know will lose their lives.

By our hands.

Funniest thing, though? We’ll be able to slip in and out of their home wearing masks. How Shiloh’s dad hated mine. It’ll be the last thing he sees. Our masks will be what anyone on the street sees as well.

No one will suspect a goddamn thing since it’s Halloween.

“He’ll pay for this.” I’m not as calm as I would’ve liked. Electricity buzzes beneath my skin. It’s pushing emotion into my voice.

Despite my carefully laid-out plans. Despite knowing I’ll shred him to pieces for every fucking thing he’s ever done to her.

She’s my priority.

Getting out of here is, too.

Right after I make her talk to me.

I’ll show her how good it feels to be as vile as me. How hot she is for it.

My fingers bite into her chin, leaving indentations in her skin. “What happened after that?”

Her hand, so soft on my wrist, puts sickening images in my head. Like bending her over. Owning her so completely that she’ll know I’m her protector. That I won’t let anyone else ever hurt her again.

I do better than that. I pretend to be mildly human and listen to her.

“He belted me. Anywhere he could. My ass. My thighs. At first, it wasn’t horrible. Nothing he hadn’t done before.”

Pain concentrates in my chest. My ribs are about to crack. The guilt of being away while he beat her up, my God. The suffocating weight of it.

In a split second, a flash of anger pushes the guilt aside.

I see her and I see red. Rivers of it.

“I could tell this time was different when he ordered the staff out. Not your mom. She stayed. Still and quiet while the belt landed on my ass and the back of my thighs. While I cried in pain. While I choked on my food.”

That miserable fuck. That monster. His own daughter, whose only sin was caring about me.

Then there’s my mother. The useless piece of flesh that brought me into this world.

I’m going to fuck her up so bad for this.

“After a while, he announced that he was done. That he hoped I’d learned my lesson. He straightened, moved away. I was miserable, and I missed you. I couldn’t stay silent. I told him to go fuck himself.” Black dots line my vision. I blink them away. Shiloh. Shiloh. I have to focus on Shiloh. Can’t go on a murder spree and be taken from her again. “That last blow knocked me back into the table. My entire body. That’s when he stopped. When I felt the warm sticky blood running down my back.”

“Never again,” I hiss. “I swear on my life. No one will ever hit you.”

“I know.” She presses her body to mine, sliding a hand up to curl around my neck. Her knife is still pressed to my chest. “Kaleb.”

“Little sister.” The simple touch of her fingers on the back of my neck has precum leaking from my cock. I lower my face to hers. “They won’t come snooping here for a while. Tell me what it is you want. From me.”

“You shouldn’t be here, damn it.”

“Not going away until you talk to me.”

“You asked me what I wanted,” she snarls, the weight of her flashback long gone. I carry it for her now. “I want you to leave. I want you to meet me at home.”

“Try again. The truth this time.”

“Go. Away.” But she pulls me closer. Her nails sink into my flesh as her body thrums against mine. “I want you to go away. I need you to listen to me. You have to hide. We’ll come up with a plan and live together forever, I swear. Where Dad can’t find us. Where I can keep studying, then work. That is what I want.”

“You’re a fucking liar, Shiloh.” I release her chin, only to pry the knife out of her hand. “You keep forgetting that I see you. Better than anyone else has. Better than anyone ever will. I bet you’re soaking. The blood turns you on, doesn’t it? You need me to relieve the pressure in your cunt after I murdered a man for you. You know he won’t be the last man I kill for you, and it turns you on that much more. I see you. I feel your body talking to me. Now. Be good for me. Try again. Tell me what you want.”

“You’re the liar.” Her gaze cuts to the knife. Back to my face. “Leave, you stubborn bastard. Just leave.”

“Stop pretending that you don’t want to be fucked. Maybe then I’ll consider leaving.”

“Please—” Her whisper gets lost in our kiss.

I pull her up against me, my hands touching her. My teeth biting her. It’s my way of telling her over and over that I’m never letting go.

“Tell me what you want from me.” I lick her, tasting her moans on my tongue.

I’d take a bite out of her if I could. Eat her flesh. Savor it. Except then, I wouldn’t be able to kiss those pretty lips again.

“You,” she cries out, yanking on my hair. “It’s always been you. But I won’t have you if you don’t leave right this minute before anyone comes. I keep telling you that and you won’t listen to me.”

“That’s it. You’re getting there. Use your words.”

She’s right. I really don’t listen to her. I *hear* her. I look into her blue eyes between one nip at her lip and the other. I see the secrets she’s hiding. The lifetime of suppressed needs.

“You have to leave.” Her sigh is weak. It’s a plea for me to stay.

I wrap an arm around her, and the knife presses her back. She melts into me when I curl my free hand around the side of her neck and kiss her deeper than before. While I’m stealing glances out the broken window.

No one passes by.

Just in case, I drag us to the door where the light switch is and flip it off. I’m a sick bastard, so I pull her back to where her professor lies dead in a puddle of his own blood. Without stepping into it, of course. We won’t be leaving footprints.

“What are you doing?” she demands.

“Tell me, or I’ll edge you worse than before. I won’t let you come this time. For weeks. You’ll be dripping with need. It’ll be nothing to shove myself inside your pussy. What will hurt is pulling out.” It’s either my threats or the knife pressing into her back that makes her shiver. Maybe both. “I’ll do it, anyway. Over and over, I’ll bring you close to the edge, then pull out and jerk off until I come all over you. You’ll cry. You’ll beg. It won’t help you. You know I’m a sadist, Shiloh. I’ll only remind you how you didn’t trust me, then do it some more.”

“I hate you.” Her gaze is pure agony and fear. She can tell I’m being honest. “I hate you. You’re doing this on purpose. Trying to get caught. It’s like you’re asking to be sent back to that place. Is that it? Is that fucking it? You want someone to come and carry you out of here because—what? I’m too much? Because you’re too obsessed to leave me alone, though you wish you could?”

“Fuck no.” I hold her through her tantrum. I’ll always hold her. “I don’t want that.”

She looks out the window, at the empty gardens. Then she looks at the door to Dempsey’s office. She must hear it as much as I do. The silence outside.

“Eyes on me,” I growl, licking her salty cheek.

She gives me what I’m after. Her blue eyes shine at me through the darkness. She parts her swollen, wet lips to speak. To finally tell me what she needs.

“Make me bleed,” she whispers as if she’s ashamed of it. As if it’s the wrong thing to ask. “I wish you’d make me bleed for you, Kaleb. When he hit me that day, when I patched myself up in the bathroom, I pretended it was you who did it. It was sick, but it made me feel better. Imagining you hurt me. It was *comforting*. But if you stay here…Fuck. You’ll get caught. You have to hide.”

“There she is.” Satisfied and throbbing in my jeans, I run my fingertips along her jawline, then snap them back to her chin. “My girl.”

One last kiss and I step back, out of her reach. I whip my hoodie off and flatten it on the floor behind me.

“Come here.”

My impatience gets the better of me. I don’t wait for her to actually do it, grabbing her by the waist, manhandling her on her hands and knees on top of it.

Once we’re done, there’ll be no sign of what we’ve done here.

She notices how carefully I’m setting the scene. From her place on the floor, she’s silent, waiting. Her resistance has been drained out of her.

I bunch her dress up her thighs. Kick her knees apart. With one swift movement, I hook my fingers into her fishnet leggings and tear them down to her knees.

“You want to bleed for me?” I stop and stare at that dark spot on her panties. I get down behind her, breathing in the temptation that she is. “Is that it?”

“Yes.”

“Fuck.” I’m unable to tear my eyes from the soaked material. “You ruined your panties. You stood here”—*spank*, because she’s been such a bad girl—“lied to me”—her other cheek gets the same attention—“told me to leave when you desperately needed to be fucked.”

“Saving you is more important than anything.” I rip her panties off her, and she gasps. In my pocket they go. “I’ll never fail you again.”

I have my hand in her hair, hauling her up to me. Twisting her so her wide, frantic eyes meet mine. “You never failed me. Of all people, Shiloh Josephine Talbot, you. Never. Failed. Me.”

“Now who’s the liar?” A tear rolls out of the corner of her eye. I catch it with my mouth.

“I love you.” These words. Three abominable words that I can’t believe just slipped past my lips. “I love you. You’re my savior. My demise. My

endgame. You're the only person who did everything they could for me. Do you hear? Do you hear it in my voice? I. Love. You."

Her whimper is as sweet and as sad as she is. With her body leaning into mine, her hands go to her heart. "I love you. You're going to get caught. Then you'll ruin me for real. But I love you, you bastard."

The other day, telling her I loved her was so out of character for me. It fucked with my head, saying those words to another person.

Hearing her say it back? I'm fucking dying over here.

Except I need to stay alive.

For her.

"Back on your hands and knees." I shove her down.

Her fingers scramble to grasp my hoodie on the floor. Treating her like my doll sends a sense of urgency through me. I shove her dress up, staring at her swollen pussy. At the wetness coating her inner thighs.

"Hurry," she whispers.

"Shut up." Her ass hasn't been spanked enough, I see. I crack my palm on it.

Three times on each cheek. Shiloh is being so good, suppressing her moans. Her body isn't as quiet. It speaks, shuddering beneath me. More arousal trickles out of her pretty cunt.

"You're beautiful." With the tip of her knife, I trace the curve of her ass. I let her try to escape, only to grab her hip and drag her back to me. "Smooth skin and all. You'll be even more beautiful when I fuck you up. *Me*."

Air whooshes out of her lungs at the first cut on her ass. I break her skin a second time, running a thin line parallel to the first.

"Such a good girl." I bend to lick both gashes, to suck on her blood. The taste of iron and *her* would've brought me to my knees if I weren't already on them. "I could go on and on." Needing the other cheek to be just as pretty, I slice two parallel lines there, too. "Weave endless cuts into your ass. Your thighs."

Her blood runs down her thighs, and I devour those fresh wounds.

"Oh God." She's crying, her voice choked. She isn't mourning her professor that's right there next to us. Not her friend that I murdered without a hint of remorse. She's crying for me. For what I'm doing to her. "Kaleb. I…I don't know what's happening to me. I don't know how I feel. Help me."

This incoherent blabbering. Her trembling thighs. Her clenching ass. She needs to come. Bad.

“You see.” I flip the knife closed. Shove it into my jeans pocket. Push her face to the floor.

She blinks, staring right at me, though a part of her isn’t fully present. Floating looks so good on her. “See what?”

“That you lied.” When I look at her, I see pain and lust. Blood and need. She’s a work of art. A filthy angel made for me. Mine. All mine. “You don’t want me to leave. You never did.”

Her eyelashes flutter. She’s in too deep. Aches for me too badly. “Yes.”

“Yes, you do. Just as much as I need you.” I sit up, my mouth opening to latch onto the gash that bleeds the most. I gather her blood in my mouth, only this time, I don’t swallow.

“Oh. Oh,” she groans. I bury my fingers in her hips, pushing them up. Spreading her ass cheeks to have better access to her pussy. “Fuck, fuck, fuck.”

She starts making feral sounds when I have my lips on her cunt. Groans and moans fill my ears as I lick her hole, painting it red with her blood. I shove her ass up even higher, spreading her lips and finding her clit.

“Pretty little thing. Such a pretty slut for me,” I hum, sending Shiloh into another round of soft curses and needy sounds.

Her clit is taut against my tongue. She’s the first one I’ve licked, and I study her. I remember what my fingers did to make her come, and I repeat the motions with my tongue. Taste her. Flick it on her clit. Flatten my tongue and run it over her pussy, over and over and over and over again.

It’s pure bliss to elicit such visceral reactions from her.

My heart is in my goddamn throat.

From being this close to her, having my mouth on her, and pleasing her. Getting off on those little sounds and her arousal on my lips.

It’s bliss I don’t deserve. One I’m taking, anyway.

I’m hard to the point of pain. Of agony. This is the worst torture. The sweetest one.

“Kaleb.” She bangs her fist on my hoodie. “Kaleb. Please. More.”

My fantasies are sick and fucked-up. I’m done holding back on them. “Tell me you’re my slut.”

Her hesitation earns her a punishment. I remove my lips from where she needs me the most.

“I’m your slut.” Rage bleeds through her voice.

“And?” I grab her ass, teasing her cunt with my thumbs. A gentle touch that does nothing for her, nothing at all.

Tears of frustration flow down her cheeks as she presses her ass to me. “I want you here. I want you to fuck me. I want you to make me filthy and ruin me. I—”

She doesn’t get to finish because I’m already between her thighs, sucking her clit. Since I’ve never done that before, I’m working on pure instinct.

I know, I just *know* that she’s into it.

Because she’s my person.

Because she wants me to hurt her. She gets off on pain. On humiliation.

With my mouth pressed to her cunt and my mouth making her cry out in pain, I’m giving it to her.

I even add teeth. Blindly, I dip a finger into an open cut, then sink it into her ass. I finger-fuck her there, stretching her and using her blood as lube.

“I’m taking your ass.” I go deeper into her ass, faster as I breathe the words against her pussy. “Gonna mark you everywhere, little sister.”

Shiloh is delirious, repeating my name and panting. I can’t see her face when mine is pressed to her pussy, when I return to sucking and biting and licking her. But I hear her. I hear how the pleasure agonizes her.

After a few short minutes, I get her there. It’s a high like no other, to have her clench around me. Her muffled screams are meant for my ears only. Her pussy pulsates, and her hips push into my face, and Jesus fuck.

She’s drenching my chin. Trembling and helpless and mine.

No riding it out with her. No waiting out her shivers and watching her pussy weep for me.

Not today.

“I need inside you.” I sit up, holding her upright while I free my throbbing cock. “Need to fill that pretty”—this slap goes to her pussy for being so fucking tempting—“cunt. I’ll save your ass for another day.”

Her anguished moan makes my dick jump in my hand. My barbell is soaked with my precum.

“Don’t stop.”

“Greedy little slut.”

Between her blood, orgasm, and her body arching toward me, she’s the most beautiful thing ever to exist. No matter where I go, Shiloh will be the

most entrancing person in the room.

She turns even more beautiful with my cock shoved inside her cunt.

"Oh, *fuck*," I groan the moment I'm balls deep inside her. The moment she whispers my name.

My fingers are buried in her hips, marking her. My cock rams into her tight pussy.

"You're so big." Her words are laced with pain. I could come from listening to her alone. "It hurts. Please. Slower."

"Not happening." I slap her ass, getting blood on my hand. "Your pussy belongs to me. You don't get to tell me no."

My stepsister is as sick as I am, moaning at my words. She fucking soaks me. "What's wrong with me?"

"Nothing's wrong with you." Her ass is painted in every shade of red. From my hand marks to the cuts. She's hurt. Bruised. I ride her like a beast. Like a starved man, I watch my cock dragging out and slamming back into her. "Nothing's wrong with being a slut for pain and your big stepbrother."

"Please. Please, Kaleb."

"Baby."

While I've been using my cock to beat her pretty cunt, her hair has fallen over her face. I lean in, tucking it away and securing it in place. Her pulse is fast under my fingers, her nape fragile. Breakable.

The desire to snap it is derailed by the need to make her come. To keep her close to me, always. As I stare at her eye, her red cheek, and parted lips, I snake my free hand to her clit. Rub, twist, and flick it the way she likes.

She's goddamn high on it, writhing against me, mouthing *please* and *I need you*. My vixen. My sex addict.

My beautiful Shiloh.

Fucking, so I've heard, is about racing to reach your own orgasm. Getting what you want out of your partner.

Bullshit.

The moment that my stepsister's pussy clamps on my dick and sucks me in, I know better.

This is about making the other person come.

That's what I'm chasing here. That's my opiate. My heroin.

I'll never get enough of her pleasure.

Fucking ever.

“Going to come inside you, Shi.” I have my teeth on her shoulder where her dad beat her. I sink them into her, watching her eyes and every ounce of lust dripping from them. “Going to fill you up with babies. Our babies. Fuck. Yes. Just milk me—*God*—like that.”

My balls tighten and my release is earth-shattering. Mind-numbing. A white-hot light like the gates of heaven that I’ll never reach flashes before my eyes.

Fuck heaven. This is it. My version of eternal bliss.

Her.

I say her name over and over until there’s nothing left in me, my teeth clamping harder onto her.

Nothing left for me in this world.

Only her and me and her soon-to-be swollen belly.

“Since when did you want kids?” she asks as I help put her back together, her voice floaty.

“Since you became my everything. Can’t stop thinking about it.” Her clothes are smoothed down. Hair tucked behind her ears. I stare at her in awe. At her eyes that slowly focus. I cup the cheeks that’ll always be mine. “Want to mark you from the inside out. I’ll do it. I am already doing it. Now let’s go home.”

“I’m not going with you.”

“Yes, you are.”

“Kaleb!” she whisper-shouts.

I tilt my head, daring her to tell me no. “What?”

“You’re infuriating,” she snaps, the sound affectionate, even when her cute nose scrunches. I would’ve lost all of that if I snapped her neck. Good thing I didn’t. “First, you tell me you love me as if, I don’t know. Just like that. Like it’s a fact.”

My eyebrows knit. “It is.”

Her lungs expand. Her eyelashes flutter and her hands are on my waist. “I—”

“Quiet.” In her home, while I head to mine, so we can continue this conversation.

“Fine, we’ll talk later.” She huffs, my precious little thing. “About babies and other stuff.”

“When I decide it’s time.” I steal another kiss, and my cock is thickening again.

She nods. Blinks up at me. “Hey, Kaleb?”

“What?”

Her fingers dig into my bare chest. “I love you too.”

Electricity crackles inside my heart. The black organ races fast, hard, and determined.

I’ll never recover from it.

“Home,” I growl as I bend to the floor and pick up the DNA-soaked hoodie. Next are my mask and hammer. I talk to her while using a wipe I have in my jeans pocket to wipe away her fingerprints from Dempsey’s face. “I won’t ask you twice. I have my car here. Let’s go.”

“*Your* car.” Her lips purse. “*Your* car. Whose car is it, really?”

Since the people who owned it are dead, yes, it’s my car. I keep that information from Shiloh. Keep her guessing while I shrug.

“You know what?” Even in the dark, she’s adorable when she’s pissed. Scrunched nose and all. “Never mind. We’ll talk. You bet we will. Later. Right now, you have to get out of here. Alone. I can’t join you.”

I pull my mask on, towering over her. I’m taller, a menace.

She doesn’t flinch.

“They saw me coming back here with him.” She jerks her head toward the dead piece of shit on the floor. “They’ll be suspicious if they find the body when no one saw me leave here. They have cameras in the hallway, not outside the window. You can run through there. I can’t. They’ll place me here at the time of the murder. It would look suspicious as fuck. I have to stay. I have to be the one to call the cops.”

Every instinct in my body tells me to fight her on this. Throw her over my shoulder and get the hell out of this place. Away from this poor excuse of a man.

Except she’s right.

We have more fun waiting for us here until Halloween.

Plus, I owe Jerome a favor and he hasn’t contacted me yet.

“I’ll be fine.” When she takes a step back, I’ve never hated anything more. No, that’s a lie. I hate the change in her eyes that I can’t understand. She’s plotting something. “I promise. Just leave. I’ll deal with this, then I’ll head home.”

I grumble.

“Alone,” she adds. The only person who’s ever given me orders. To ever get me to listen to them.

“Okay.” I pull the hood of my hoodie over my head, careful not to touch her and leave traces from my soaked clothes on her skin. That distance is also at the top of my list of most hated things. “Straight home, you hear me?”

“Straight home.”

Her eyes take another dark turn. I’ll force whatever it is out of her later.

Later, I’ll do a lot worse.

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19

SHILOH

"Nine-one-one, what's your emergency?"

"Help! Help! Oh my God!" I scream into my phone, hoping Kaleb hears me from outside. I pray that he thinks it means I'm staying here and won't be looking over his shoulder in the next few minutes. "Help me!"

"Ma'am, calm down," the male operator says. His voice is reassuring, but I can sense the tension beneath it.

You learn to pick up on the small things when you need to survive an abusive father. Majoring in psychology helps, too.

"What's happening?" he adds when I'm quiet. "Are you in any immediate danger?"

"Someone just killed my professor." My wail is anguished as I tiptoe over Dempsey's body. "Psychology. I'm in the Department of Psychology. I rattle off the name of my college and the room I'm in. "Help. Help. Oh God."

"Someone is already on their way," the man reassures me some more. "Are you hiding in a safe place? Is the attacker still there?"

"No. Yes. I don't know." I stick my head out of the broken window, watching Kaleb's figure as he walks toward the gates.

From here, he'll head to his temporary home. The place he's staying in. I have to know where. The only way I can do it is by stalking him. The only way to get him to stop being reckless is by scaring the stubbornness out of him.

I need to wrap up this call quickly. I have to get out of here before the police arrive.

For that to happen, I need a good excuse to leave the crime scene.

“He’s here somewhere! I know he is!”

“Deep breaths.” Kaleb grows smaller as he gets farther away. He’ll disappear any moment now. “Ma’am, what’s your name?”

“Shiloh. Shiloh Talbot.” I inhale loudly, being obnoxious about it. My sheer terror needs to go on record. My fear has to be heard. Then this. “He was a short man. Stocky.”

They won’t be able to disprove it, ever. No cameras—no evidence.

“Professor Dempsey pushed me out of here and told me to go hide in the nearby office when the—” My sob is a wretched, shuddered one. “When the man started breaking the glass. Joe, my professor, he saved my life. I came back here to get my phone and call for help when it was quiet. I found him—him—”

“I’m going to talk you through this. First, you have to go somewhere safe. Are you able to leave the office?”

Why, thank you, operator.

“Yes. But I can’t stay here. Have to get out. He could be anywhere. He could kill me.” My stepbrother becomes a tiny dot. He disappears into the darkness. If I don’t see him, I won’t be able to follow him. *Shit*. “I’m getting the fuck out of here. I’m leaving.”

“You have to stay there to be interviewed. Go somewhere safe. There has to be a safe place, like that office you hid in?”

“No. No, I refuse to die here. I won’t.”

“We’ll send officers to your apartment, then,” he resigns.

Not good enough.

“I’m going to stay at a friend’s house.” They’d never be able to track me down. Not when I’m leaving my phone in Dempsey’s office. “I’ll come down to the station first thing in the morning.”

“Miss Talbot, this isn’t how it works.” You’re in the middle of a crime scene. We need your testimony.”

“When you’re talking to me, *this* is exactly how it works.” I raise my voice, still sobbing—gotta keep up the act. I start hightailing it in the direction Kaleb went. Our connection is so strong that it’s like I’m picking up on his scent. “I think I’m going to have a panic attack. So, you’re going

to let me have this one night to regroup. My father will be distraught if I cause a scene."

"It's standard procedure, ma'am. You have to stay there for an interview."

"Contact my father's lawyers. Here." I offer him the number Dad made me memorize. Anything to avoid a scandal, in case I ever find myself in one. "They'll handle this. I have to go. I'm getting out of here. I'm leaving my phone, too, so he won't be able to stalk me. Who knows what he has on us? Any of us?"

I add a few extra sobs for good measure and end the call while the operator pleads that I stay on the line. After sending a quick text to Dad's lawyer, I run back to leave the phone on Dempsey's desk. There's nothing incriminating on there and I'll have it back tomorrow anyway.

My clothes, pocketknife, and my bag are on me. Time to stalk my stepbrother.

I start jogging, smiling when Kaleb's frame comes into view. My feet rush toward him. My heart does.

He doesn't see me, doesn't glance behind him. Walks ahead like he doesn't have a care in the world.

This intense, unhinged man. This wonderful one.

After tonight, he'll understand that he can't be a loose cannon. Until we're safe, he has to listen; otherwise, there'll be consequences. He has to realize that two can play this game.

Adrenaline floods my veins and I hear everything. Sirens blaring in the distance. My feet pounding on the trail. My bag thumping on my side.

Kaleb's heartbeats. I swear they're just as audible.

Run, run, run.

The few people who are still here don't give me a second glance as I bolt out the gate and into the street.

Kaleb has managed to get away. His large frame is nowhere to be seen. So instead of trusting my eyes, I open my heart to feel him.

There he is.

I follow my hunch, crossing the street, heading into a dark alley.

Sure enough, he's there. He's got balls, that's for goddamn sure. Parking two cars behind me.

If I stay here a second longer, he'll see me.

I’m quick to hide, flattening my back against the wall of the building that faces the street. I peek at him when I think it’s safe.

Damn him. It should be illegal, how he turns a simple movement like opening a car door into something so hot.

Heat rushes down my body, and I curse under my breath. Think. I have to figure out how I’m going to track him down.

He’s staying in my neighborhood. I’m pretty sure of that. But since I need to be *absolutely* sure, I sneak into a flower shop to my left, waiting for his car to drive past me.

“We’re closing soon,” the blonde lady behind the counter informs me.

“I’ll be out in a sec.” I bow my head as I browse through the plants arranged beautifully in the storefront. My hair covers my face. The low light in the shop does the rest to hide me.

One, two, three, and there, his car drives past me. In the direction of my neighborhood, as I suspected.

He looks every bit of a menace without his mask on.

“Thanks.” The bell hanging over the shop’s door *dings* as I pull it open and step out into the cool night breeze.

I’m sore between my legs. My thighs. I’m high from chasing him and from killing a man who thought he could assault me.

I head to my SUV, missing Kaleb so damn much. My chest aches with it.

I don’t care about the trail of dead bodies he leaves behind. I don’t give a fuck about how depraved it was to have sex next to one.

He loves me.

Soon, as long as we play it safe, we’ll have an eternity together.

My bag goes to the passenger’s seat in my car. I get in and peel out, merging into traffic. It’s just after nine, so it’s starting to lighten up. Blue and red lights flash in my rearview mirror. A crime scene is being picked apart.

As much as I hate it, I’ll have to go back tomorrow. I’ll have to attend my classes.

Kaleb wants to play a little while longer. Once he promises to do it on my terms, I’ll let him. Just until he’s willing to get out of here. Until we have a sustainable escape plan. One that doesn’t end up with us being dead.

I want to let him, too, though it doesn’t actually matter. I’m not delusional. I know he’s an unstoppable force. He’d make me play with him.

Better to go along with it.

Finally, I arrive to my neighborhood. His car is parked in one of the small streets. I swivel my car in the opposite direction, squeezing it into a parking spot two blocks from my home, and climb out.

My footfalls are muted as I tread across the pavement, searching for him. I sense him here. I hear him.

Something's dragging. Feet, I hear them.

My heart slams into my throat.

Someone might've stalked Kaleb from school. Eddy could be here, surprise-attacking my stepbrother. Making sure he'd never get a chance to strike first.

That can't happen. I won't let it.

Fuck. I've never walked this fast in my life. I would run or scream, but then a neighbor might look out their window. They'd call nine-one-one.

They'd take Kaleb.

Not happening.

I'm there, close to the dragging feet. Except, no one's dragging anyone anymore.

I can't see him, I can't—

"Don't, please, don't." It's a helpless, muted man's cry. "I was only doing my job."

From my hiding spot behind a nearby building, I squint my eyes, finally seeing Kaleb. His head, at least, and shoulder. He's behind the bushes. The ones surrounding my building. They're the densest in our neighborhood.

They're hiding the person that Kaleb has dragged back there. The man who's pleading with him for mercy.

Kaleb is still in plain sight, his mask back in place. Just a man leaning against one of the building's walls.

An infuriating man.

My man.

I slide closer, lurking in the shadows as I stalk him.

"Ronan Talbot." The man's voice is barely audible. He sounds choked. Kaleb is choking him.

It's absolutely wrong and filthy to be turned on by that.

His violence. The strangled voice that means Kaleb is torturing the man.

The pain from fresh, bleeding wounds on my ass gets me even hotter, now that I have time to focus on that.

I’m horny and morbidly curious at the same time.

Why is this guy saying my father’s name?

“Why are you here?” Kaleb asks the question for me.

Cough. Cough. A desperate breath. “He pays me to be here. Stalk h-h-his daughter. Stop. Stop. I don’t wanna die.”

Holy. Shit.

I was right. My father posted a man out here to stalk me.

A tiny flash of relief, and I breathe easier. Though my dad only hires the best of the best, he fucked up. He hired a complete incompetent.

Had he been even a mildly decent private investigator, he would’ve reported back to Dad about the masked man lurking around my apartment building. Dad would’ve hired people to handle the *problem*.

No one’s here to kill or lock up either Kaleb or me.

The short, weak investigator hasn’t reported anything of consequence to anyone.

Unfortunately for him.

Kaleb throws him over his shoulder as if he weighs nothing. Heat pools between my soaked thighs as he comes out from behind the bushes and trudges to a nearby building.

He goes inside as if he lives there, which he does, I suppose. In the next minute, he’s gone. Safe from prying eyes.

Not safe from me.

Briefly, I consider chasing him. His hands are full, and I could take advantage of that. I’d come up behind him and press my pocketknife to his thigh, a threat to slice through his femoral artery.

Never.

The neighbors could come to the windows because of the commotion while Kaleb has a dead body over his shoulder.

Before my mind starts going into problem-solving mode, a light goes on on the first floor. A small one, probably from a lamp.

A clue to tell me where Kaleb lives.

Moving stealthily through the shadows, I make my way to the apartment building. No code on the door. Good. I take the stairs two at a time, stopping on the first-floor landing.

Deep breaths help me get a hold of myself. Once I’m ready, I pad to the apartment I think is the right one.

There’s a soft dragging sound coming from the inside.

Then, a whooshing sound, followed by a *bump. Bump, bump. Bump.*

A body being rolled into a rug. I'm sure this is it.

I'm sure this is Kaleb's new home. Where he'll hide the body for the night.

I hope he'll wait until tomorrow. Back in Professor Dempsey's office, I asked him to stay put for the night. He wasn't thrilled about it, but he agreed. He gave me his word.

That has to count for something.

As quietly as humanly possible, I slide down to the floor by his door. The tiles in the hall are harsh and cold against my bruised ass. Against the fresh cuts that have my dress clinging to my body.

That's okay.

My mission takes precedence over everything else.

In a few minutes or hours, I'll be inside Kaleb's home. In his bed.

On top of the hottest and simultaneously coldest man I've ever known.

He won't fight me on this after tonight. He'll understand what worrying about him has turned me into. That I'm just as dark and depraved as he is.

He'll listen. He will.

I'm not going anywhere before he does.

KALEB HASN'T LEFT the apartment since I camped out here. Hasn't put himself at risk.

He's been listening to me.

Rationally, I know it should comfort me.

Problem is, he's also been awake for hours. Meaning I've been awake for hours.

Alone. Out here.

I've had too much time on my hands. After the jarring evening Kaleb and I shared, thinking for so long has done awful things to my psyche.

Worst of all are the memories I've long since locked away.

Memories of our five months together.

The five best months I've ever had. When he was my big brother. The one person who truly paid attention to me. The only one who cared.

“Shiloh,” Kaleb said my name in a strange way. An affectionate way, as much as a boy like him could be affectionate.

It was one of those afternoons that we spent in his room instead of mine. I was particularly upset since it was the first anniversary of my mom’s death since a ski accident had taken her life. She’d never been warm to me. Never hugged me or read me bedtime stories.

She had, however, defended me when Dad was in one of his moods. I missed her presence, how she’d get him to watch his favorite show instead of yelling at me. How he’d listen to her.

Those days were gone.

My memories of her were starting to fade.

Dad hadn’t even mentioned that it’d been a year at breakfast or at all.

If I hadn’t marked it in my school journal, I wouldn’t have remembered it, either.

Tears pricked at the corners of my eyes. The Sea World jigsaw puzzle on the floor blurred into blue, orange, yellow, and gray splotches. No fish. No water. Just blurred colors.

My chest was so heavy.

“Shiloh.” A large hand on my shoulder felt warm and comforting.

I twisted my head up to Kaleb. He sat next to me, but I couldn’t see his face past his mask. Past the black holes for eyes that hid the golden embers behind them.

What I could do was to hear his unasked question. The concern in his voice that wrapped me in a comforting metaphorical blanket.

“I’m fine.” My brows scrunched at the lie. I blinked back the tears, swiped at my soaked cheeks, and repeated, “I’m fine.”

“Try again.”

“No.”

He squeezed my shoulder. It hurt, though not in a bad way. I wasn’t ever scared around Kaleb. “Try. Again.”

When I did, I cried. I wept and pushed my face into his chest. He hung his arm around me and said nothing. It was awkward for him. My emotions. My pain, laid bare.

He listened to me, anyway. He did what he could to be there when no one else would.

Sigh.

I don’t mean to say that I’d grown dependent on him. I loved him. He was the closest thing I had to a family.

Then…

Rage and indignation swirl inside me. My fists are clenched, fingers digging into my palms.

He had to go and murder my attackers.

He left evidence behind. Made it easy for them to take him away.

He’s been equally reckless this week. With Marina. My professor. The private investigator.

Without him, I had nothing. My heart was ripped out of my chest.

I loved him, then fell for the memory of him despite the brainwashing. Despite the fear.

Knowing it was fucked up didn’t change it. Studying couldn’t fix that.

This entire time, I needed *him*. More than that. I need him to be okay. To be free. To have a life outside of this nightmare he’s been stuck in for eleven years.

Why doesn’t he care about that? Because of me?

I’m not worth it. I’m not.

The games aren’t worth it, either.

He is.

The vein in my neck throbs. My breaths quicken.

He won’t throw it all away. He won’t waste his opportunity to be free.

I won’t let him.

I get up, fishing out a bobby pin I have lying around in my bag while trying to contain the anger bubbling inside me. I was supposed to be calm thanks to this. At the very least, level-headed.

The lock gives in, despite my rapid heartbeat and hot anger. I learned how to do that when I picked the one to my room when Dad would lock me in there for too long and I had to use the bathroom.

I learned it while I was crying.

I’m not crying tonight.

I’m on a mission, and that mission is—

It’s—

I just want him to promise me he won’t kill people in public anymore, damn it.

Any shred of rational behavior has left my body. I’m past controlling it.

It’s impossible for me to get a handle on myself as I close the door behind me. My hand shakes with barely contained rage.

I have some sense left in me, though. Enough to lose my bag at the entrance of the small apartment. I walk around the rolled-up rug on the floor. Around the dead body.

Kaleb’s sleeping peacefully. Lying on his back over the covers in nothing but a black pair of briefs, hands crossed over his chest, as if he’s going to be put in a casket.

Not on my watch.

Death won’t separate us. Nothing will.

Unless I kill him.

If I could drag him back from the dead, I’d do just that.

Since I can’t, I go to him. Lose my boots and climb on the bed.

I straddle him, torn fishnets and all, wrapping one hand around his throat. I grip the knife in my pocket, and he stirs beneath me.

Golden eyes snap open, glimmering in the dark.

The world is nothing but a shadow at the edge of my vision.

My resolve is a distant memory.

All that’s left is him.

Kaleb. And he’s up.

“Fancy meeting you here, little sister.”

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KALEB

My emotions rarely show on my face. They hardly exist, period.

I'm aware of what an anomaly I am.

Most people aren't like me.

They tear up in movies. They laugh at jokes.

They sure as fuck talk a lot when they're nervous or excited.

Me? I can hardly crack a smile. Over anything.

But she makes me smile.

My Shiloh.

Slivers of moonlight seep in through the paned window, illuminating the otherwise dark room.

They cast a hauntingly silver glow along her face. Over her lips which are pressed into a fine line.

They highlight the madness lurking behind her eyes. Darkening her soft cheekbones in a tinge of red.

She shakes her head, snapping out of the shock.

Rage takes over, and it's so fucking gorgeous that my mouth finally curves up.

"You reckless, cruel motherfucker."

If this isn't the essence of beauty—if this palette of emotions isn't something to obsess over for a lifetime—then honestly, I don't know what is.

And that knife she's holding up. She recovered it from the crime scene and she's threatening me with it.

Her other hand, it's around my throat and *fuck*.

I've been awake for less than five minutes, listening to her move around the apartment. It's been such a turn-on, preying on my huntress.

My cock is throbbing for her. My whole body is throbbing for her.

The real her. Every unhinged part of her, shining from the inside out.

Rage rolls off her in waves. Hot and suffocating.

I keep eyeing her. She squeezes her tiny hand around my throat. Demanding my attention. My air. My life, I think.

I'll give her something better than that.

I'll talk to her using the only love language I know.

Pain.

"Me?" I'm stronger. Bigger. Meaner. I flip her on her back, caging her between my arms.

"Yes, you," she growls like a wild animal, still choking me. Still turning me on. But the knife has dropped to the bed, the blade shining in the dim moonlight. "You don't listen. Why don't you care? Why?"

Today has affected her in ways I couldn't have expected. For whatever reason, it's turned her into this. Into someone who's coming apart at the seams, and I'm here for it.

The look she's giving me. They way her muscles work in her attempt to strangle me. Her high-pitched whispers.

God. My cock is about to tear out of my briefs. I press it into her, earning myself a growly, "You bastard."

"I don't think so, little sister. I've been so good." I sneer, my harsh expression getting me what I wanted. Another one of her emotions that I can't get enough of. Her fear. "For you."

She flinches into the pillow. Her hold on my throat loosens. I grind my hips into her another time, and she tries, oh so desperately, to close her legs. Never.

"I've been so fucking good, Shiloh." Stroking my thumb along her jawline earns me a shiver. A widening of her eyes. "I stayed home tonight. I did what you asked."

"Not before you killed *him*." Ah, so I wasn't wrong about it, after all. I could sense that I was being watched. I figured it was her; I just couldn't see her. I couldn't stop myself, either.

It was either him or us.

I'll always choose us.

My air supply is running thin as she chokes me with everything she has in her.

I'll survive.

"I did it for us." And I had fun while I was at it.

"I know who he was. I overheard. But you promised. You—"

I cut her off by shoving the skirt of her dress up to her waist. My fingers skim over her swollen lips, teasing her bare pussy that's dripping for me.

We both groan at the contact. At how she has no panties on, how needy she is. I've done this to her. Me.

"Your daddy hired him to stalk you." Every breath. Every move I make. Every heartbeat. They all center around her. I can't stop wanting to fuck her. To stretch her tight cunt. Filling her up with babies. "I thought you'd be grateful that I took him out. Yet here you are, being a brat about it."

She grunts and huffs. Goddamn adorable, how she fights to get me off her. How her hand grips me harder than before.

"You should've let *me* do it." Her voice is low and hoarse, anger and lust rippling through her.

The nonsense she keeps speaking comes out of her mouth because I allow it. Because I need it.

No one's ever cared for me, and it makes me feel something. For once, I want to feel it.

"You should've let me kill my professor. I'm not the one they're searching for. I could—I fucking *should*—take the fall for you. Why won't you let me?"

"Fuck no." I stretch her tight cunt open, shoving two fingers up to the first knuckle.

Her pussy clenches around me, sucking me in. But her mouth says, "Not now. We need to talk."

I don't give a fuck about talking. I'm rubbing her, putting those pretty moans in her mouth. Those scrunched eyebrows that mean she's angry. I love it when she's pissed off.

"I'm the one who takes care of things for you." Even though it feels dangerously good to have her care for me like that, I'm her protector. I emphasize just how serious I am by curling my free hand around her throat, mirroring her hold on me. "You better get used to me, or these won't be the last angry tears you cry."

Her lips part in shock. She's been crying for a few seconds now while my cock is rubbing her through my boxers, and my hand closes on her sweet throat.

I lean in, forcing her to bend her elbow as I go lower. My tongue finds that precious, salty taste of her tears. I dry hump her, hard for her. I don't stop licking the tears off her cheeks.

"Kaleb," she begs, her fingers stroking my throat. "Please."

"The answer is still no." My lips brush the shell of her ear and I'm done holding back. I crush her beneath my weight.

She answers by arching her back, pressing herself closer to me. She couldn't resist me if she tried.

"I will stop at nothing to protect you." When my teeth sink into her plump bottom lip, she changes her hold on me. Grabbing the side of my neck. Pulling me closer. "I'll do it for you a million times over. Until my dying breath."

"You can do it when they're done hunting you, Kaleb." Her breath is hot on my lips and, *fuck*, I need to destroy her pussy.

I need to own her other hole.

All of her.

I release her throat, pushing my briefs down, stroking my cock, sliding it between her lips.

"When we're safe. When—Jesus, I can't think when you suck on my throat like that." She pants, her peaked nipples grazing my chest through her dress. "Stop. Stop it right fucking now."

"No." I'm feral, taking her sensitive skin in my mouth, marking her over and over.

"Get off me, I mean it."

She doesn't, and we both know it. I grab the base of my cock, line it up to her pussy, and thrust. Warmth spreads through me when I'm all the way in her, up to the hilt. She's hot. Soaked. Mine.

"I hate you." The words are cruel, but her touch softens. Both her hands thread into my hair, grabbing onto me with such desperation. Such honesty. It eats at what little sanity I have left. "I hate you more than I've ever hated anything."

"Strange. You didn't seem to hate me earlier. When you were full of my cock, bleeding and moaning for me like the whore you are." Sliding a hand to the side of her neck, I press a thumb to her pulse point. She's a wild one.

The best thing in my life. “You were soaked and begging. Made a mess of my cock.” Each time I drive into her, her breath hitches. My blood thrums for her. “I’m drenched in you now, too. Doesn’t feel like hate to me.”

“I told you to come here and hide. I told you to hide yesterday.” Her accusations shouldn’t get me harder. They do. “You won’t listen. You didn’t leave me a choice. I had to come here and hurt you so you’d agree to do what I asked you. But—but—”

“Keep going.” I suck on the other side of her neck, leaving another mark. Hoping against all hope that I can inhale every raw emotion from her and selfishly hold on to it. Whatever she’s feeling, it’s gorgeous. I want that. “Let it out.”

“You have no idea.” She balls her hands into fists and slams them against my shoulders. Once. I fuck her harder for that, groaning at the feel of her pussy pulsing around me. “No goddamn idea. It hurt everywhere, having to live without you. Worrying over what you might be going through. I was shipped to another state, and it was the worst. Do you hear me? I had a hole in my heart. The guilt was killing me. Missing you was killing me. I knew it was wrong, but I loved you anyway. I fell in love with the memory of you. Don’t do this. Don’t take this away from us.”

The way she says these things. Such a desolate, broken sound.

“Let’s go.” I pull out of her, get off the bed, and carry her in my arms across the bedroom.

“No.” She’s adorable. This little thing who won’t stop kicking and scratching my chest.

I cradle her into me. Soak up the rage that’s been pent up inside her for years. I withhold the storm for her. I’ll do that for fucking ever.

“You left.” She’s a human wildfire, her flames licking at my skin. Scalding me. Getting me harder for her. She’s having a meltdown, and I bathe in it. The panic. The loss of control. I also need to fix it. “Then you promised to go where it’s safe and I caught you. I caught you killing a man. That means anyone could.”

One arm under her thighs presses her so tight to me that she gasps. With the other, I gesture toward the rolled-up corpse in the living room. “Look at him.”

“I won’t.”

“You asked me to hear you out.” My gaze burrows into her frantic one. “It’s about time you do the same.”

“They’ll be coming for you.” Her growls are slowly becoming one of my favorite things about her. “It might even happen tomorrow after the police interview me. And now, with the investigator gone, Dad will definitely send someone here.”

“We’ll worry about tomorrow when it comes.” We’ll also discuss my plans and how I get to keep her here, to mess with her head some more. Just because I like it. “Until then, I have his phone. I reported to your father. As far as he’s concerned, nothing’s going on.”

“He might’ve seen something before that.” That loser private investigator. “He might’ve reported that.”

“No, he didn’t. He was lazy. Hadn’t noticed me breaking into your apartment or coming up behind him. However—”

“You should’ve gone into hiding!” Her fingernails break the skin on my chest.

A rougher approach, it is.

I put her down, hook an arm around her waist, and pull her to me. Her back is flush to my chest. My fingers curl around her delicate throat, holding her in place.

Once more, I have to bury the desire to snap it. I get off on being violent with her, but once she’s gone, there’s no getting her back.

“However.” I sink my teeth into her earlobe, and she whimpers, scratching my forearm that’s around her stomach. “I’ve had enough. He had to go. I couldn’t let him get in the way of our games. I’m having so much fun with you.”

“Why do you care about these games so much? What about you?” The dull pain from having her foot stomp mine is such a turn-on. She’s hot when she’s being protective of me. “Why don’t you care about what happens to you?”

“I care about you.” Her breaths are labored the more I restrict her air supply. The hotter and more furious I make her. “You, Shiloh. There’ll never be a day when my world won’t revolve around you.”

“If you wouldn’t have killed those kids”—it’s fascinating, how she thinks that her tiny foot could ever hurt me—“you would’ve stayed.”

Up until this point, I had managed to keep my temper under control. I had my shit together. We were playing.

This? This suggestion, again, that I should’ve spared their lives after what they’d done to her?

They touched her. They violated her.

She was just a kid and they made her cry. The shame that followed was worse.

When I humiliated her, she loved it. She was always mine in one capacity or another.

Not theirs. Never theirs.

“That’s it.” I haul her up and off the ground, taking her to the bathroom. “This is where I draw the line.”

“What are you doing?” Her little feet kick the air, but I ignore it. “What the hell are you doing? We were in the middle of a conversation.”

“Punishing you.” I put her down inside the shower, flipping the light on.

“For what?” She spins before I manage to tighten my grip on her waist, glowering at me.

Removing her fishnets, I whip her dress over her head, ignoring her protests. “For suggesting those vile pieces of shit deserved mercy.”

She pounces on me but doesn’t get a step in before I bury my fingers in the soft flesh of her waist. Her lips twist. My grip is relentless, and I can’t help inflicting pain on her.

Can’t help what happens next, either. I reach for the drawer under the sink for one of the new disposable razors I stocked today, grabbing it while she punches my shoulders.

I tear the wrapper with my teeth and spit it out. The cap on the razor comes off next.

“You got locked up for it.” Her eyes snap from me to the razor, then to my face. “It wasn’t fucking worth it. I wasn’t.”

“You don’t get it, do you?” The murderous fire inside me builds and builds the longer I have to listen to this madness. I pin her to the wall with my hips, slamming my free hand next to her head. “They assaulted you. They deserved to die.”

Her eyebrows knit together, her lips pinched. Chin quivering. “But you—”

“I could’ve done better, okay?” I seethe, my face inches from hers. Her blue eyes are oceans. Waterfalls. A violent whirlpool sucking me in. “Could’ve been more careful, sure. But I can’t change the past. And you’re deluding yourself if you think I’ll ever apologize or regret killing them. This is the last time I’m telling you that.”

“Being locked up.” The torture in her voice reaches deep. Tugs on the slivers of humanity inside me. “For me, it—”

“Shiloh, you won’t ever insult me by repeating what you just said. How you weren’t worth it. Do you hear me? Do you fucking hear?”

“You don’t care.” Those tiny punches do nothing to hurt me. My chest is made of stone. My body can take it. It was meant to absorb her pain.

It’s her anguish that gets to me.

“You don’t care. If you did, you wouldn’t have done it.” She’s really going at me now, her blows to my chest losing their rhythm while she’s hitting me. *Tap, tap. Tap, tap, tap. Tap.* “Wouldn’t have been taken away. You’re doing it all over again and you don’t care. Why won’t you listen?”

“I am listening.” I’ve been listening to her repeat it over and over. Watching her sanity slip away. She needs reassurance, and I won’t lie to her. Honesty is all I’ve got left. “I hear you. Thing is, I don’t regret anything I’ve done for you. I won’t. And for the love of God, stop worrying that I’ll get caught. I won’t.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I already told you. But since you’re past listening, I’ll talk to you in the only way you understand. Through pain.”

“No.”

“Yes.” She’s no match for my strength. I flip her over, shoving her face up against the wall and spinning a knob, turning on the water in the shower. It’s cold at first. I wait for it to warm, my body shielding Shiloh. While I do, I wrangle my boxers down to the floor. “You’ll be getting fuckloads of it tonight.”

“I asked you one thing,” she huffs, but she opens her legs for me. “One thing and you won’t give it to me.”

“Ungrateful brat. You should be thanking me.” The water spray gets in my eyes while I kneel behind her. “For being attentive to your needs. For giving you everything.”

I don’t need her gratitude, not really. I’d burn the world down for Shiloh. Any day. Any time. For no reason other than knowing she’s safe.

“Stay,” she mumbles as I spread her legs farther. She flattens her hands on the wall, looking down at me. “Stay.”

“Never leaving you again.”

Water streams down her body, caressing the curve of her back, her round ass. The red lacerations I left on it shine, the crimson red so fucking

tempting that I lean in and lick it.

More. I need more. I tilt her hips up, throbbing at the sight of her pussy. Her ass.

“Never.” I lean in to swirl my tongue around the rim of tight muscle, moaning into her.

Moaning harder when she clenches around me, her ass cheeks brushing against me. I slide my hand that’s on her back lower until my thumb presses to her asshole. Where I’m taking her tonight.

“Oh God.” She shivers, pressing into me. Offering herself.

A moment ago, she was willing to cut me up. I understood why. Her fear of losing me. The memories of the police officers hauling me out of our home.

We didn’t have a chance to say goodbye.

She’s terrified it’ll happen again.

This ends tonight.

“You won’t have a choice.” Her voice, her ass, her muscles. They all strain for me when I push past the tight hole up to the first knuckle. “When they find out…”

“Enough.” I shove my thumb all the way in.

“Please,” she gasps. Squeezes. Sucks me in. I drag it out, pushing back in, and she hits the tile, the sound echoing in the small bathroom. “Please.”

“You’re going to be a good slut for me and be quiet.” I grab her bruised ass while pumping my finger in and out of her, using the water to make it good for her. To stretch her for me. The need to fill her up with my cock is overwhelming. “That’s how I won’t get caught. If you’ll be my good girl.”

“How does this”—when one of her cuts opens under my touch, she moans, eyes squinting at me—“have anything to do with you not getting caught?”

“You’re not focusing on what’s important.” I pull my finger out, working two into her, getting off on her pained gasps. I had no idea if she’d like it, but fuck, she does. Taking my cock in her ass will turn her into a screaming mess. “This is me, helping you relearn what you should’ve never forgotten.”

“You’re hurting me.” Though she whines, she pushes her ass to me. Not like anything she did would ever make me stop. “Don’t—I can’t. Your fingers, they’re so thick. And it’s back there. It’s wrong.”

“You like it.” Another finger in her ass and she curses.

She hates how her body reacts to the pressure, how she seeks me out. I reward her by grazing my teeth on her ass, sucking the blood that trickles down her thighs.

Her “Oh, no” and “Fuck, fuck, fuck” reach straight to my goddamn balls.

“You’re a whore for the pain. Desperate for me.” I’m everywhere. Her thighs. Her ass. Licking. Pumping. Ruining her. “For your destructive, murderous, emotionless stepbrother. Killing people doesn’t bother you. I know. Your savior complex, though. That’s gonna be a problem for me.”

“No savior complex. I need you to be okay, because you’re everything to me.” Her heavy breathing turns the words into moans. Her lust is intoxicating, and I fucking love that she’s losing her mind. That she writhes on me. Fucking my fingers. Leaning forward for a minute, grinding her clit against the wall, then pushing back to me. “Need you here. With me.”

“As much as I appreciate your concern…” It’s agony to pull out of her. Her hushed curses manage to fix it. Her pain is a balm to mine. “As much as I love you for it, we’re going to do things my way.”

“You said that again.” Her wet hair sticks to her face as she gawks at me. “You really mean it.”

I raise an eyebrow, looking at her as water streams down on both of us. “That we’re going to do things my way?”

“No.” Her frown curves her lips downward. “That you really, really mean it. Say it again. Please.”

She’s stunned that this is more than a game to me. More than an obsession.

Of course it is.

It’s a fact.

Sun rises in the east. Birds fly in the sky. The ocean is wet. And I—

“I love you.”

“Kaleb.” Her chin dimples.

“I mean it. I meant it the first time. I’ll mean it for the rest of my life. Now be quiet.”

“I really meant it when I said I loved you too.”

“I know.” My eyebrows scrunch. Eyes narrowing. I lift the razor so there’s no confusion about what I’m doing here.

That silences her.

Both she and I can tell why I have the razor out. I won't be shaving her tonight. Won't leave the skin that I haven't harmed yet soft and smooth.

It's there to wake her up. Cut the guilt out of her.

"You've earned this." Putting the blades to the back of one of her thighs, I dip my chin in warning. "Take it like the good girl you are. While I slice through you, think about your actions. About how right we are for each other. How all our past, all the bullshit, is nothing but background noise. Nothing but lies. There's one truth in your world, Shiloh, and it's me."

I break her skin, cut a straight line along the back of her thigh.

Then, I kneel, chasing the blood with my tongue.

She's a picture of strength, of resilience, pinching her lips together to keep silent. I'm hurting her, worse than before. The wound isn't deeper, but she's tired. It's late. She's already been through hell and back today.

Still, she gives in. She trusts me.

"Fuck." I'm so hard it hurts. So hard that I have to fist myself as I drag the blades down her pretty leg.

She moans, but she isn't the only one. I'm moaning with every stroke of my cock. With every new blood drop racing down her legs.

I keep licking and sucking it off her. Inhaling her pain. Her anguish. I drive her wild, and she mumbles, "Stop, stop, stop," while spreading her legs wider. Lifting her heels and tilting her ass up to offer me her sweet cunt.

Coming in my fist before she does is unacceptable. But she's tempting me to the point that I almost do. So I release myself, focusing on the only mission I have in life right now.

Hurting her. Erasing her intrusive thoughts.

"Stop it," she cries out softly.

While I slice down her other leg. While I go back to stretching her ass, driving three fingers into her.

This is more than a punishment by now. This is our carnal, depraved desires intertwined.

This is us.

"Good girl. You're so good, Shiloh. Being so quiet for me." I move back, cast the razor away, and grab her hips, holding her upright.

"Please, please. Kaleb." She quivers, knees buckling, her pussy clenching and unclenching on air.

“Look at you.” Our gazes clash, and there it is. The tunnel vision I’ve been aiming for. There’s only me in her world. Except we’re not finished here. “Your greedy cunt is hot for the pain I give you, desperate for release.”

Rivulets of water and blood cascade down to the tiles beneath her. The scent of her arousal has my fingers burying into her flesh. I’m this close to letting go.

“Question is…” My gaze dances between her bloody, sliced thighs, and her begging eyes. “Are you here with me? Will you listen this time?”

“I’m—Please.” Her nails scratch the tiles. “Please.”

“I need to know that you’re not lost inside your head.” I get up, pressing my thighs to her wounded ones. Wind my fingers through her hair and press my lips against her cheek. “That you’ve been listening. That you’ll stop doubting me. Tell me that you know that I’m not going away.”

Her eyelashes are dark. They flutter while she remains silent.

She’s beautiful. She speaks to the soulless, emotionless monster in me, and she has no idea. No fucking clue.

She changes me.

I won’t give in to it. Not until I have her verbal response.

“Kaleb.”

“Say you understand.” I won’t go soft on her. Being soft means risking everything, and I’m never going to do that. “I’m not messing around anymore. I’m here to stay. Tell me you understand.”

My hips thrust her into the wall and her face twists in pain. I’m the least gentle I’ve ever been with her.

After slicing her thighs, that’s saying a lot.

“Words.” I grab my cock, lining the tip to her ass. The feel of the cold metal of my barbell pressed against her crack forces a gasp out of her mouth. “Use your words.”

She blinks. Her gaze is a mixture of pain, lust, and awareness. She’s finally here. Present, Mine.

Where she belongs.

“Swear to me.” Her teeth graze her plump bottom lip, sinking deeper. I press into her ass because I can’t help it. Can’t help wanting to sink every inch inside her. “Swear that you won’t get caught. Fucking swear it, or so help me, I’ll handcuff you to the bed and gag you. I’ll leave you there for years if that’s what it takes to—”

I shut her up with my mouth first. I tilt her face to me by her chin, kissing her as if I'd die without it. Lips, tongue, teeth. I assault her for all I'm worth, telling her a million words through my touch.

We're fighting and groaning. Moaning as we battle with each other.

Through this kiss, I convince her that I'm never going away. Slowly but surely, she relaxes into me. She tells me she trusts me. She believes me.

"Fuck, Shi." That's the first thing I say after that. Can't keep it inside when the head of my cock slips inside her ass. When she parts her lips, shocked as fuck that I pushed myself inside her. "Baby. You're so tight."

My forehead rests on her temple, both of us breathing hard. This is nothing like being in her pussy. I'm drunk on her. On the pain in her eyes. On how they darken and lust bleeds through them.

"Your virgin ass feels so good. So—*God*." Another inch in. I need it. Another one. "Fuck."

"Yes. Yes. But no, I can't, we can't." Her eyes are wide, frantic. "This is so wrong. Your piercing in my ass. No. Another day. Please. Another day."

"Love it when you beg."

Both of my hands are on her hips, stilling her wriggling body. I pull out only to move us two steps to the side, avoiding the water stream.

I have better lube I can use.

"Thank you." She thinks I'm her prince in shining armor. Looks at me like one while I gather blood from the fresh wounds on her thighs.

It's hot and sticky. Fucking perfect.

"Glad that you're getting it now." I tilt her hips up with one hand, smearing blood on my cock with the other. I repeat the motion over and over until every inch of me is red, including my barbell.

"Getting what?" Her forehead creases, her eyes sliding lower to where I rub blood on myself. Eyelids drooping, her breaths grow labored. "No. Yes—I mean, no. Another day. Another fucking day."

"This—" Both of us let out a harsh, pained breath when I push the head inside her ass again. I have my hand around her throat, my thumb tipping her face up to me. "Is what you want. This is what you need. The reminder of how strong I am. For you. For us."

"Why does it have to be now? I'm so tired."

"You're so *mine*. I'm giving you pain. And love. And everything in between. You'll take it, because I said so. Because you need it. Say you understand."

“We’re sick,” she whispers, her voice small. Pained. It doesn’t stop her from offering herself to me. From submitting to me.

“The rest of the world is.” This push into her is the deepest I’ve gotten into her ass. It almost knocks the breath out of me. “We’re the only thing that’s ever made sense. If other people have to die for getting in our way, so be it. They will die. We won’t. Get. Caught.”

I add more blood as lube, rub it around her rim, on my cock. Drag myself out of her, then shove back in.

Her mouth, she can’t close it. Shock and agony race across her face. While she’s offering herself to me.

I love her.

My woman.

My little toy to use in every depraved way possible.

The rest of my blood-soaked cock disappears inside her as I shove it up to the hilt. She’s hot, squeezing me and screaming silently.

“I wish you could see yourself.” I’m unable to tear my eyes off her ass. From my red cock and how it stretches her. How she takes me with every. Fucking. Thrust. “That’s it. That’s my girl. Letting me use your ass. Letting me give my pain slut exactly what she needs.”

“Kaleb.” Her gorgeous gaze is set on my face.

I’ve never felt this exposed. This raw. I’m hurting her, owning her like we’re two animals in the wild.

But with one look, Shiloh takes from me, too. She owns a part of me. A part of my wretched soul that I’m never getting back.

Fuck my soul, I’d rather have Shiloh instead.

“You love my cock in your ass, don’t you?” I’m ruthless, pumping in and out of her. My hand around her throat allows me to feel her hot breaths. Her pulse. Her fear and desire, the emotions I put on her face. My cock thickens, knowing that I’m responsible for it. “You love that I lubed your pretty hole with your own blood.”

“No—*oh*—I—” Her brow scrunches, though she isn’t trying to push me away.

“Wrong answer.” The blood on her thighs keeps dripping. I get more of it on my fingers, reaching to her front, to her taut clit. “Try again.”

I rub her and fuck her. Thrusting my cock so deep that she begs me for something. Anything.

I have my cock and my love and my miserable heart to give her.

And that’s what she’s having.

I don’t go easy on her. Don’t stop. I’m possessed, and it’s her fault.

That orgasm of hers that I’ve been craving, it comes like a wave crashing into the wall. Her body slams into mine and I absorb it into my lungs, my heart, my blood. I soak in her tremors and moans, pressing my mouth to hers.

God, she’s a mess. I wouldn’t have her any other way.

“Gonna come inside you.” The pressure on my cock peaks and I lose myself. She’s mashed between me and the wall as I release every damn drop into her ass. “Mine. You’re mine, Shiloh.”

“Yours.” She snakes her arms up to my neck, and I hold her while she sobs.

She cries for me.

Her sanctuary.

Her worst nightmare.

Her home.

Hers.

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21

SHILOH

Dad's private investigator—Wren Moore, according to his ID—sinks silently to the bottom of the ocean.

There's no one at the pier to witness his late-night burial. Not even the pier's security guards. Kaleb made sure of that. He even knew where to go so no cameras could record us dumping a body into the ocean.

Meaning this wasn't his first time.

Couldn't be. He was too familiar with the area.

My heart hurt—just a little. I don't like it when he keeps secrets from me.

Like the identity of the man who'd been feeding him my pictures and whereabouts. Or who lived in the apartment he'd taken over.

He wouldn't answer my questions about either of those subjects on the ride over.

And I couldn't let it go. Once we arrived, I wouldn't leave the car until he gave me at least one answer.

"Don't worry, Shi. No one's been following us. The PI's phone? Other than reporting to your dad, I placed him back behind the bushes. Where he's supposed to be. I'll text your dad tomorrow."

"What if Wren floats?"

"Don't care. We'll be out of here right after Halloween."

"In three days? What happens then?"

"We kill our parents."

"Are you serious?"

My last question went unanswered.

Kaleb went back to his silence. Same silence he'd been holding on to while he soaped me, shampooed my hair, and massaged conditioner into the roots. He took extra care applying ointment to my wounds and patching them up, then was even more careful undoing the knots in my hair with his large fingers.

The black hoodie I'm wearing is the one he helped me into. The sweatpants, socks, and sneakers. All of them are his, and they're huge on me. We had no time to go to my apartment to change.

I'd ask where he got the money for the clothes, except I know he won't tell me. Not tonight.

In the chill of the night, as we watch the PI's body sink lower and lower, I accept his silence. His secrets. For a little while, I'm submitting to Kaleb fully.

I inhale the scent of him beside me. The new smell of clothes. The salty fragrance of the ocean. I latch onto his arm, leaning into him.

Most of all, I revel in this moment. The pleasure of having him here. Near me.

Safe from imprisonment.

He might be a murderer. A man who only has eyes for me.

He's ruthless and quick to act.

He's also my person.

My obsession.

Mine.

"How could you afford those weights anyway?" Once we're back in the car, the spell is broken. My questions rise to the surface. I can't help that I'm curious about him. What if he needs my help? "And that rug seemed new."

He tilts his head, staring at me through his mask.

An eerie silence envelops us. It would have other people running for their lives. Me? Warmth slithers up my spine. My heart thumps in a soothing cadence. My cheeks heat.

This is everything I've been dreaming of for eleven years. His undivided attention. I wanted it back after they took him from me. Then, I wanted more. A different, more grown-up version of him.

Now that I have it, I want *all of him*.

Too soon, the fuzzy feeling gives way to a tightness in my chest. It's not fair that he won't let me in. It isn't right that he carries the weight of saving us by himself.

"You know, um." My forced smile must look as fake as it feels. "Those things we used to drown a corpse?"

His eyes are hidden, yet his gaze is just as powerful. Just as probing as if I were staring into those golden pools without a barrier between us.

"Could you at least tell me who's paying for this?" I hug my middle, forcing down the nagging concerns. He promised he wouldn't get caught and I have to trust him.

He doesn't have to do this alone, though. Surely, he knows that.

So I try harder for him. I smile, hoping he'll see my love shining through it.

Kaleb's head remains at that creepy angle when he presses two fingers under my chin and tips my head up.

Don't you trust me?

That's what this gesture is about. That, and he's tired of talking. He's doing his best to be communicative for me, but he's not in the mood. I can tell. He needs me to understand.

"When you're able to talk, please come to me." I wrap a hand around his wrist, stroking the inside of it. His pulse. I'm addicted to the feel of it. "Let's go home."

He grows a little softer, caressing my jaw with his thumb. Kaleb tells me in his own way that I'm his good girl. That he'll always come to me.

We drive in silence through quiet streets, through light traffic.

"I'll be there. For you." I place my palm facing up over the console and he laces his fingers into mine. We wore gloves to handle the body. We don't anymore. It's us, skin to skin.

"I won't let go, Kaleb." No matter what he tells me. No matter what he has planned for us, like killing our parents.

My bones nearly crack from how hard he squeezes my hand. I hold steady. I take it.

He returns to the parking spot we left less than an hour ago, a few feet from his apartment.

Well, not his.

Whose is it?

The recurring question dies out when he wrenches the passenger door open.

The crisp fall air hits me first, then it's him, throwing me over his shoulder. His arm around my legs—careful, without hurting my wounded skin—is so comforting I could die like this. Just like that.

I try to mirror the sentiment by rubbing his giant back. His muscles ripple under my touch as we walk to the apartment. His body speaks to me, though his mouth won't.

As he sets me down in the shower and whips my clothes off, I get lost in his touch. In him.

He said it and I felt it before—we belong together. We do. It's as simple as that.

For the second time tonight, Kaleb lathers shampoo into my hair and massages soap into my skin. Leaving no trace that we ever drove a body to the pier and dumped it into the ocean.

He cares for me, even though he's so deep inside himself that his eyes are as bleak and emotionless as ever.

I don't ask, letting him wash me thoroughly as if he hadn't done it right before we left. Meticulously. Methodically.

He does it to show me he's changed. That he takes care of what's his while erasing the evidence of a crime.

My body wakes from his rough attention, impersonal as it is.

My nipples peak as he cleans them.

It's then that he rolls them between his fingers. It's then that I lean into him. My skin breaks out in goosebumps. My pussy is soaked, thighs squeezing his hand as he soaps me there.

His gaze darkens, and he takes me here, up against the wall.

He's brutal and ruthless. Holds on to his orgasm until my nails scrape his shoulders, breaking the skin. Until his blood runs down the drain, and my orgasm milks his cock.

Then he fills me with his cum.

With babies that I would love to have once we're in the clear.

A problem for tomorrow.

There'll be time for babies.

Later in life.

Kaleb is still a fugitive. I still have to be interviewed about Professor Dempsey's murder. And Kaleb said we'll stay here until Halloween.

Meaning I'll have to stick to the plan. I have to show up at school today, to grieve while pretending that I still want to pursue my career as a psychologist.

I don't.

This was always about understanding my fixation with Kaleb and who he is. I thought we'd never have the opportunity to be together. That my maddening, unconventional obsession was a sickness.

It isn't. I realize it now.

We're fine.

He patches me up a second time, tucks me under the covers, flipping me to face him. The bed is warm. His body is hotter.

My eyelids are incredibly heavy. They weigh a ton or so it feels.

"Tell me." His voice is hoarse. That's what happens when you don't speak for hours at a time.

"Tell you what?"

His hand on my jaw wakes me up. I'm being jolted to life by the simple gesture of tipping my head up to him. Of having his lips brush my temple. My nose. My cheek and lips.

"The first night I walked into your apartment, you were hiding in the closet." He's never told me that part before. I frown, and he rubs the creases between my eyebrows. "Don't act so surprised."

"The finger you left me."

He nods. "You kept my mask."

My body is about to burst into flames as I remember what I did that night.

He blinks, a hint of a rare smile teasing his lips. "You used it."

"You were going to tell me something," I snap.

Another rare thing happens. He huffs out a laugh. "Okay, yeah, perv."

"Kaleb!"

"Kidding." In the darkness of the room, his golden eyes are like two embers. "It turned me on."

"Oh God."

"About the thing I was going to say."

"Tell me." I wrap my fingers around his wrist, kissing his knuckles. Using it to drag myself closer to him. He hums, snuggling into me.

"You—it touched me. Here." He splays a hand on his naked chest. "I'm different. I don't care about people. This isn't how I'm wired. I haven't felt

compassion for anyone until I met you."

Another kind of warmth sinks into my bones. I'll never tire of hearing him say these things to me. Just me.

I'll never tire of listening to him. He's opening up to me and I embrace it fully.

"Was it always like this for you?"

"You mean before my dad beat me up?" His tone is flat.

My throat locks.

It's devastating, his story. Every time he brings it up, a small part of me dies. It's the worst kind of pain. Worse than Dad's insults and beatings. Worse than having these boys touching me.

"You don't have to."

"I want to share it with you." He's closer to me somehow, his body and his soul. "My dad would raise his voice. His fists. Mom let him. She never left, and I understand why. I get why she stayed. Why she stood by when he punched and kicked me. He was huge and violent. He hit both of us. What came after that was what put her on my shitlist. She wouldn't come into my room. Wouldn't ask how I was. No patching me up, nothing. She let me bleed and told my teacher I was a clumsy kid."

"Oh, Kaleb." I'm crying. Can't help it.

"Don't cry over it. Over me. I don't." His flat tone tells me he isn't faking it. I hurt regardless. "I'm just fucking here, telling you what you wanted to know. If I was born that way. I was. I didn't care that she didn't give a fuck about me. Didn't *need* her to. That's what I'm trying to say. I never gave a shit if she was on my side or his."

It doesn't matter that none of what happened affected him. I hurt for him anyway. He'd been living with these monsters for over fourteen years. Fourteen years of abuse. It never should've happened to him.

Ever.

"Kaleb." The lump in my throat is big. Huge. Suffocating.

I need him. So I reach for his cheek, stroking my fingertips over his stubble. His high cheekbones. He's hard beneath my fingers. Cold.

Mine.

"What?" His harsh glare pierces me.

"I'm so sorry." I scoot closer to him, sliding one leg between his and slipping my palm down to his naked chest. "I'm so terribly sorry they did that to you."

“Don’t.” His eyes narrow. Fingers bury into my cheek. “This isn’t a poor-me story. I won’t have your pity. I’m talking to you. We’re having a conversation.”

“You can’t tell me how to feel.”

“I can and I will.” The malice bleeding from him makes me shiver. Makes me fall for him that much harder. “I’ll belt your wounded ass for days if you stare at me like that again. I’ll use my teeth and knife to scar every inch of your skin. Especially that part.”

When his fingers skim over the scar Dad gave me, a hum escapes me.

“I’ll cut you up.” He looks dangerous in the moonlight filtering through the window.

Kaleb’s mask could instill fear in a person’s heart, sure.

The sharp angles of his face and how well he blends into the night are far more terrifying than anything I’ve ever seen.

“I won’t stop there.” The swipe of his thumb along my wet cheek is a warning. “I’ll jerk off and come inside the gash. It’ll burn and you’ll cry and I won’t care. I’ll hold you down and do it for hours.”

I blink. Nothing else to do in the face of his crude words. The depraved images. My bones shake.

“Your tears and pain will always be a better reaction than your pity.”

My eyes probably reflect my fear and arousal. He studies me for a beat longer, then nods.

“Just so you know, I don’t feel an ounce of sympathy for her.” Kaleb’s blasé as he continues his story. Direct. Honest. As if he hadn’t planted horrifying and tempting images in my head. “Maybe I would’ve tried to help her if she had shown me that she cared. When she asked your dad to let me stay, it was too late for us. I don’t want and never will help her. Or anyone. Anyone other than you. You were the only person who ever made me feel.”

It doesn’t go unnoticed that he’s skipped a huge chunk of his life. Between the beatings and our parents getting married after two months of dating.

Eventually, he will.

For the time being, this is enough. This is more than enough.

“You became my entire world, Shi.” He scowls, as if that upsets him.

Like he can’t stand the distance, he tightens his grip around me.

I can’t take not feeling his heartbeat either.

“Why me?” I trace my hand up and down his chest, calming myself by pressing my chest to his. Tilting my head up to take in his handsome face. “What’s so special about me?”

The corner of his mouth ticks to the side. He can tell I’m not fishing for compliments. I’m genuinely curious about him. About the magic that drew him to me.

Worry niggles at me too. If it just happened, it could just as easily disappear.

“We were meant to be.” His fingers tuck my hair behind my ear. “That’s why I broke into your home that first night. I couldn’t and won’t stay away. I’ll burn the world for you, little sister. You’re mine. Forever.”

I’m choked up. I’m floating. My emotions swell, lifting me higher. “That’s that?”

“That’s that.” His smirk is gone. “I wasn’t attracted to you for years, though. While you were a kid. That’s the only thing that changed. The way I saw you.”

“I know. It was the same for me. I was around fifteen or sixteen when I started thinking about you in a different way. But not because you did anything to bring that up. You were the one who protected me against everyone else out there.” I remember what it was like to have predators look at me. Touch me. Debase me. During the months that Kaleb lived with us, it was never like that. “Who got you my photos?”

“Where are your manners, rich girl?” His tone is teasing. His pull on my hair is less so. The roots burn, my eyes tear up. He pulls me and leans into me, and my heart skips a beat when our foreheads press. I’m in love with this moment as much as I’m in love with him. “I started asking you a question. You’re going to be a good girl and let me finish.”

“O-okay.” I have no idea what question, but I nod anyway. “You climbed into my bedroom and?”

He stares at me. Building tension. And I let him.

“Other than humping my mask—”

“Kaleb!”

“Hey, no use denying it. I told you it was hot. Might ask you for a repeat one day.”

This is the most humiliated I’ve ever felt. There’s a burning in my neck. My cheeks. My ears.

“In case I wasn’t clear, let me repeat myself. It was. Fucking. Hot.” He kisses my nose. It does nothing to cool my skin. Then again, I don’t want to hide anymore, so I guess there’s that. “Why were you in the closet? You do that often?”

“It’s an old habit. I picked up on it after they’d taken you from me. When Dad would scare me.” Sugarcoating equals lying, and I refuse to lie to him. “When he fed me those lies about you. When he’d beat me up. When he wouldn’t let me write to you those first couple of years. I’d hide. I shouldn’t have. He wanted to break me. He wanted”—I won’t cry anymore, won’t shed a goddamn tear over that monster—“me to believe that I was alone in the world. He did everything to ensure that I’d never go to the press or anyone in an attempt to get you out. That’s why I hid. I won’t anymore. Nothing scares me other than you getting caught. Nothing.”

His curious stare is all I get. He should be shouting at me. Turning his back on me for not fighting Dad harder. Blaming me for hiding, for being weak and awful to him.

He should call me out on my shitty behavior. He could accuse me of being weak, for not trying hard enough.

All I get is crickets.

“I’m sorry.” My heart weighs a million pounds. “When the news broke, the guard and driver you killed, his words came back to haunt me. That you murdered people who didn’t deserve it. I thought I’d be next.”

A low, ominous growl reverberates in his chest. “That bastard.”

“Remember when I asked you to kill me?” I hurry up before I lose my nerve. It takes a lot to admit that I betrayed him. How I didn’t believe that he had a good reason to kill his guard. The driver.

He had the best reason. He was making good on his promise.

He was coming for me.

Kaleb nods, tugging on my hair. Raising my lips to be so close to his.

“I thought you would. You deserved it, to kill me as revenge. It was my fault you were in that damned hospital in the first place.”

“I swear to God…” The air between us is charged. Soaked in repressed violence. “There wasn’t a single moment that I resented you for anything. It hurt when I didn’t get any letters from you. But I could tell you missed me. I knew your dad was a controlling fucker. And you were alone, which fucking gutted me just the same. I couldn’t stop thinking about that. How I wouldn’t be there for you. Then I heard you were sent away from him. That

was when I could finally sleep at night. Every second I spent in that place was worth it because you were worth it. Still are and always will be."

"Who told you I moved away?" I trail my fingertip up to his throat, tracing the veins. The blood thrums beneath them. "The person who got you my pictures? The one you mentioned in therapy?"

"Yes." His hand slips lower, a manacle around the back of my neck. A possessive grip. "Jerome. Short guy. Black hair. Green eyes. He had outside contacts. He saw me for what I was when I told him one day I'd break out. That in exchange for information, I'd kill one person for him."

"Jesus, Kaleb. You are not going to—" The controlling prick he is, he catches me mid-tantrum, shutting me up by kissing me. I hate that I have to break away from our kiss. "That's another risk you're taking. I won't allow it. That's it. We're leaving tomorrow morning. We'll disappear. No more games, none of that. We're going."

"Calm the fuck down." He tilts my head to the side, biting my earlobe. I squirm and he sinks his teeth deeper. When I whimper, he whispers, "Remember this. We're sticking to the plan. I won't get caught tomorrow."

Tomorrow. When Jerome cashes in on the favor, the one Kaleb said his friend had texted him about during one of my classes. Damn both of them.

"God, I hate you."

"Liar." He chuckles, low and dark. "Say you understand. Say we're going to play for as long as I see fit."

"I understand." His gaze is on me again, harsh and demanding. I narrow mine. "If they catch you, I'll kill you before they put the handcuffs on you. I will. I swear I will. Then I'll kill myself."

"Yourself?" That last sentence shakes him. It's visible, this storm that takes over his expression. "Not fucking happening."

My lips pinch. Hope flares that he's had a change of heart. "Watch me."

"Shiloh." His hand is on my throat in a second. "Are you asking to be shoved inside my trunk for hours? Days? Hmm? Is that it? I'll give you bathroom breaks and treat you like my cum hole. You won't know what time it is. What day it is. Where we're headed. Your sole purpose in life would be to eat, breathe, and get fucked. Your mouth, ass, cunt. I'll destroy every hole in your body. That's what's going to happen if you ever threaten to hurt yourself ever again."

I can't be soaking for this. I'm not.

“Fine, I won’t.” We’re at a standoff, both of us breathing fire. “But you owe me.”

“Owe you what?”

“Information.” His eyes soften at that. “Whose house is this?”

He eases his grip by a fraction and tells me everything. About the couple he killed. Where their bodies lie.

While I’m worried about getting caught, I’m equally appeased. I finally have my answers. I have his honesty.

I’m not in the dark anymore.

I think.

I hope.

Soon, he won’t be in the dark about anything anymore, either.

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22

KALEB

She’s gone.

I can tell Shiloh isn’t here before I even open my eyes. Before my consciousness fully returns to my body.

A predator notices *everything*.

The emptiness on her side of the bed. The chill that wasn’t there when I fell asleep. Her weight beside me, it’s nonexistent.

She isn’t here.

I whip my head to the side, verifying what my heart already knows. “Shiloh.”

Nothing.

I’m out of bed, throwing on a pair of clean boxers, jeans, and a hoodie from the dresser.

“Shi,” I warn, shoving socks over my feet and wrangling into my sneakers.

Of course she doesn’t answer. I can tell she’s gone.

I have to find her.

My chest squeezes when I see her note on the kitchen counter.

Be right back. Love you.

The nauseating feeling that tightened its grip on me when I woke up persists. My chest, fuck, it hurts.

I know where she is, and it isn’t at the police station. She would’ve woken me up for that. Wouldn’t have needed to sneak out.

She’s outside doing something she shouldn’t.

Something I wouldn’t approve of.

A short trip somewhere. Where?

Be right back.

She. Snuck. Out.

Alarm bells go off in my head.

It could be…

No.

No.

One stop to the bathroom to brush my teeth and wash my face, and I’m out the door.

My hoodie is pulled up to hide most of my face. The shadows hide my distinctive gold eyes in case that indie reporter thinks it’s wise to come snooping.

She mentioned that her dad paid him off. I checked his blog last night when she dozed off in my embrace.

Radio silence, as expected.

For now.

See, the thing about people is that they lie. He could have taken the money and then stalked us anyway.

Therefore, my hoodie.

I’m not getting caught.

I’m going to find her.

Clouds hang low in the sky, painting the neighborhood in gray. A quick scan tells me that there’s no one lurking around her apartment building. Not a reporter.

Not her.

My mind races a million miles a minute. Worrying about what she’s doing out there is eating me alive.

You already know.

Fuck. Damn it. I don’t want to know. Except I do.

At this moment—when I suspect she might be doing what I think she’s doing—I’m done being a man. A person. I’m feral. An animal.

A hunter.

I stalk over to the main street where the pharmacy is.

Where I suspected she’d be.

Unfortunately, I wasn’t wrong.

My sweet little sister is here, wearing her own clothes. A pair of light jeans, a gray coat over a black shirt. Her hair is wet and hanging in thick waves down her shoulders.

Her head is bowed down as she leaves the pharmacy. A futile attempt to go incognito. To hide herself from the world.

From me.

It might work on everyone else. The people who pass her by will never notice this hidden gem.

I will. I do.

That bag in her grip. That plastic fucking bag and the water bottle in her other hand. I wish I never knew what was in that bag.

I wish it were Tylenol or Nyquil. An allergy med or what-fucking-ever.

No. None of that.

She bought Plan B.

A sharp pain slices through my head.

God. Fuck.

Fuck.

I get it. Wrong place and wrong goddamn time to have a kid.

Being on the run while pregnant is the definition of reckless. A woman could suffer morning sickness. She could need bed rest. There's no telling where we'll be in a month. A year. If the baby would need help.

I have a solid plan, true. However, there's always a chance that things could go wrong.

We could lose the baby while we're trying to claim our lives back.

I don't want that. I'd be crazy to want that.

I might be fucked in the head. An abomination.

I'm fully aware that waiting for our life to be less chaotic is the right thing to do. One hundred percent.

But damn it all to hell.

Understanding her doesn't make it any less painful. The pounding in my head won't listen to reason.

This pill. This fucking pill. I have to rip it from her hands before it lands on her tongue.

I could do that. Walk over there. Snatch the bag out of her hand in broad daylight. Drag her back home and fuck her until she's a sobbing mess, begging for my forgiveness. Until she listens to reason.

Until she trusts me to *always* be there for them. My family.

It won’t get my point across.

Shiloh’s into that kind of pain.

For all I know, she might try to buy that pill again just to spite me. Just to get me to rut into her while I mark her sweet flesh. Her cunt. Her ass.

Damn, I’m hard for this.

I slip into an alley where she won’t be able to see me. Where I can think.

I have to teach her a lesson that won’t be enjoyable for her.

A reminder of what a monster I am. How capable I am of tearing the world apart.

That’s how far I’m willing to go for her. For our baby.

I’ll hurt her, too. Not yet, though. Not until she actually goes through with this. Only then will I show her.

She has to *see*.

The thought of hurting her sends fire through me. Adrenaline floods my veins, turning me into a predator with deadly instincts.

She walks by me, her eyes still fixed on the floor, her hair falling over her face. The urge to fist the silky strands and pull until she screams—until the veins in her throat bulge—is strong. All-consuming.

The breath I suck in helps subside it.

I stick my head out, watching her small steps on the pavement. A cool breeze laps at my face, dousing the searing heat of lust and anger.

A fraction of it, anyway.

With my shoulders squared and my hands curled into fists, I follow Shiloh.

A man holding coffee in one hand passes by me, ignoring me in favor of his phone call. Good thing he did. For his sake, granted.

Less so for Shiloh’s. Because I’m coming for her. Her and no one else.

She’s faster now, turning and cutting into an alley. I can’t hear the sound of her footsteps, so I stop where I am.

Listening.

A bottle cap unscrews with a hushed *pop*.

A package tearing sound follows.

And there it is. Another *pop*. This one has to be the blister pack.

My teeth are about to turn into dust. That’s how hard I’m grinding them.

Shiloh gulps.

That’s my cue.

Her first reaction is to press her back against the wall of the building. She winces at the pain of her wounded ass and thighs brushing against it.

Then she coughs. Blinks.

She sees me there, so close that I block out the sun.

“No.” Her blue eyes bulge. It should be illegal to be so enticing when I’m that mad at her.

So seductive.

“Well, hello there.” Before she manages to hide the plastic bag in the pocket of her coat, I snatch it out of her hand. “What’s in the bag, little sister?”

“Give it back.” She leaps at me.

She’s missing more than a couple of inches to reach it. I lift it higher, turning the plastic bag over so its contents fall into my other hand while I glare at her.

When I finally look at it, I have to bite my lip.

Or I’d scream.

I hate her. I love her. I want to crawl under her skin.

Can’t get enough of her and her pissed-off expression. She hops on the balls of her feet, her chest pushing against mine.

“Bad girls don’t get to have anything. You should know that by now.”

“It’s not what you think.”

“Is that so?” I throw the bag to the floor to free up one hand.

Fuck her water bottle. I swat at her wrist, and it goes tumbling to the ground, too.

She desperately hops up and down and I’m done with this.

I wrap an arm around her waist. Drag her deeper into the alley where we won’t have an audience.

“Kaleb. No.”

Her reddened cheeks and frantic gaze do things to me. My mind slips. I feel it as it’s happening. Feel the control over my body dwindling.

Her neck. It’s so slender. It fits so perfectly in my palm.

All I’ll have to do is—

No.

I love her. I’m keeping her.

Alive.

But not before her punishment. Her lesson. She’s not getting away with this. I grip her chin, thrusting my hips and shoving her back into the wall.

Another flinch. God, she's adorable. I wish she'd tell me just how much my marks hurt.

Later.

"I want to have babies with you." At least she's honest.

She knows there's no use denying what she's done. I have the evidence right here. Held up between us. Yet she isn't sorry. She's determined, glaring daggers at me.

"It looks exactly like what I think it is," I hiss, rocking my hips, grinding my cock against her. Once. I fucking need it.

I need her.

Back to punishing her. To showing her that no monster will ever be worse than I am.

That I'm the best and only man to protect her.

"We—I—" Her bottom lip wobbles. She growls, snapping her mouth shut. Deep breath. "I owe our baby a better future than what we can offer them right now. Parents who won't be on the run. Who'll be able to give them the love they deserve."

I'm about to tell her no one will ever love them as much as I will. This creature that'll be half-her and half-me. I'll love it as much as a man like me can.

As much as my dark soul allows.

My body ripples with knowledge. With fury.

With her suggesting that I won't be able to.

Anger morphs into gut-wrenching sadness.

What the hell is this?

I don't recognize this pain.

Only I do.

My insides twisted just the same on that awful day.

They touched me. I didn't want it. It hurt.

The pain that started in the pit of my stomach rises. A million daggers tear through my insides. Puncturing every organ in their paths. I'm bleeding on the inside, and motherfucker, the pain.

"You're scared they'll turn out like me."

"No. God, no. Please, Kaleb." She grabs my hoodie. "Didn't you hear me? I said—"

"No." I slam a hand next to her head. Crush the damn pill box between me and the wall. "I heard you just fine. I understand."

I'd have to be an idiot not to, right? I told her she was the only person I'd ever loved.

Meaning—fuck—that I might not love our baby at all.

It'll never happen. I haven't been incapable of love for years.

I'll always love her and our kids. *Always.*

But I get why she worries. I planted these ideas in her head. That she was the only one my heart would ever open up to.

"Take a deep breath." Her fingers dig into my clothes. I release her chin to bat them away. "You have to calm down. You have to calm down to listen to me."

"I said I understood." I look left and right. No one's stopping on the street. No one's staring. Looking back at her hurts so fucking bad. "Who'd want a kid with someone like me?"

"I—"

"Did I ever tell you that I terrified my preschool teacher?" I lower my face to hers, breathing fire. "She called my parents, asking them to transfer me to a different school. To homeschool me. Anything but be in her classroom."

Shiloh shakes her head, her hair swiping at the harsh wall behind her.

"Dad beat me up good that night." Memories pummel into me. I'm not in pain as I relive them. They just are.

"That bastard." She grips my hoodie again.

"Shut up, Shiloh." One hand slams over her mouth, another on her throat. The Plan B box drops to the floor. "*Freak*, Dad called me. *Blood-sucking vampire! You think I got nothing better to do than take care of your bullshit?* He got too close, so I stabbed his foot with a knife. He kicked me so hard I passed out."

A tear leaks down her cheek, wetting my palm.

I lean in to lick it. I'm a selfish, sadistic bastard. She'd do well to remember that.

"He wouldn't have hated the idea of me procreating. I get why you'd hate it just the same. Why you'd try to kill our baby." It doesn't matter that my body heats at her touch. At her hand on the side of my neck. I'm pissed. Gotta remember that. "I even understand that now isn't the right time. But I don't give a fuck. You're not taking Plan B. Ever."

A sting on my wrist. An ache in my shin. She's clawing at me. Kicking me. Screaming into my palm.

Hearing her apologize for it will be the worst. Her pity will eat at whatever sanity I have left.

“You will love me, damn it.” I haul her off the wall, dragging her deeper into the alley. Behind the building. Behind the bushes. I killed a person behind a similar one last night. I’m going to force Shiloh to love me here on this gloomy morning.

“You will have our baby.”

We’re both crouching, both breathing hard. With one hand in her wet hair, I push her head until she’s looking at the ground.

“In a few months,” she gasps when I remove my hand from her mouth. “All I’m asking for is a few months. I do want your baby. Please, listen to me.”

I should.

Because she isn’t apologizing to me. Doesn’t tell me that I’m the problem.

There’s no *I’m sorry* tumbling out of her while I press my middle and index fingers together in front of her face. While I use them to shove her bottom lip down.

So yeah, I should listen.

Problem is, I’m too wrapped up in my emotions. Too far gone for that. I never handled so many of them. All at once.

They’re bearing down on me. Punching my ribs from the inside.

My temples throb. My head spins. God, the pain.

Is this what people babble on about when they talk about heartache?

I’m glad, then, to have been born a freak. To have had twenty-six years of being free of that bullshit.

“I don’t care, Kaleb. I will never give a fuck about what anyone else says or thinks about them.” Breathless pleas. Tears in the corners of her eyes. I don’t let up, even though her speech is garbled with my fingers in her mouth. “I’ll love them with my whole heart. Always. But please. *Please*. You can’t believe that this is the right thing to do. It’ll make running damn near impossible. We won’t be able to blend in. I won’t be able to run. So many things could go wrong. You know this.”

“I know I’ll protect you.”

“I know”—*breathe*—“you’ll try.”

The world ceases to exist. Images upon images assault me, as vivid as if they’re a movie.

As if they’re my life.

My beautiful Shiloh, growing our baby in her womb. Her skin stretching to accommodate the tiny thing.

Her palm rubbing her beautiful stomach while she has her feet up in my lap. They do that in the movies. Massage pregnant women’s feet. It alleviates the pressure, and yeah, I’ll do it for her.

Then—movement from inside her body.

We’re sitting in a home with a view of the ocean. Free. Careless.

Us.

Something isn’t just moving anymore. They’re kicking.

I abandon her feet. Put both palms on her belly.

We both feel our little one.

We smile at each other.

The movie ends.

I’m back to the present. In the city. Dark clouds. Impending rain.

I’m in hell.

“Soon,” she whispers, staring up at me. “When we’re out of here. When we find someplace safe to stay. Please. You have to understand.”

The images linger there, in the back of my mind.

It’s mine, that movie. That life.

“No, Shiloh. I don’t understand.”

Eleven years was a hell of a long time to wait. I did it because I had to. I’ll never regret it.

I’ll never regret this, either.

“Open up. Wider.”

“I love you.”

“Open. Up.”

She relents, sighing as she leans on my knee with one hand.

“Good girl.” I shove my fingers all the way down her throat. It clenches around me. She’s scratching me through my jeans as I increase the pressure. “Alas, you’ve earned this punishment, Shi. This one’s all on you. You need to learn the hard way just how protective I am of not just you but our future babies. Do you see that now? Do you understand what *I’m* trying to tell *you*?”

Her spit dribbles down my wrist. I curl my fingers, coaxing more gagging sounds out of her.

“Let it out.” With my hand threaded in her hair, I push her lower. Rub her sweet, hot throat over and over and over.

That first heave is precious. She wretches hard. Spitting and coughing water down my hand. Soaking my sleeve.

“Good girl.”

I rub on the back of her throat, forcing another heave out of her.

This one gets me what I’m after.

The half-digested pill rests there, on my sleeve. White on top of black.

The throbbing in my head is replaced by instant relief.

“Good girl. You’re such a good girl.” I take Shiloh in my arms as she gasps for air, sit on the ground, and cradle her in my lap. “You did so well.”

“We’ll regret this,” she says, her arms hanging around my neck. Her head rests on my shoulder. “If it happens, if I get pregnant, we’ll live to regret it.”

She knows about my plan in broad strokes. What she doesn’t know is that the authorities will never come searching for us. I’ll tell her about it later. Soothe her when it suits me.

She’s scared. Panicked. Her rippling fear gets my cock hard and my blood thrumming in my veins.

I’m a bastard.

She loves me, anyway.

“We won’t.” I plant a kiss on the top of her head. Inhale her scent and pull her closer to my chest. “We could never.”

“It’ll be the best thing ever, you know.” She draws circles on the back of my neck, her fingertips soft on my skin. It’s nice. Calming. I store the information in my head as another thing that makes Shiloh happy. “If our kids turn out like you.”

My brow furrows as I pull back to stare at her. “I didn’t hear you.”

Despite the silence surrounding us. Despite us being so close.

I couldn’t have heard what I think I did.

“They’d be better off having your genes. Being a carbon copy of you. Don’t give me that look. Of course I want them to be like you, Kaleb.” Her palm is as soft as silk against my cheek. For over a decade, I’ve slept on rough sheets and pillowcases. Nothing like this. Nothing was ever as smooth as her skin. As her words. “Strong. Resilient. Confident. Beautiful. You.”

“What about you?”

She shakes her head.

My fingers snap around her wrist. I'm hurting her again. Don't give a fuck. "What makes you think you aren't all those things? Because your dad was a prick who fucked with your head? Because two molesting fuckers assaulted you?"

Shiloh is brave, lifting her chin to meet me eye to eye. "Yes. And I let them. You wouldn't have."

"Fuck that." She's light in my arms as I stand up. "Fuck. That. It wasn't your fault. You're human. More human than I could ever be. It's beautiful to watch. So beautiful to experience life through you, Shiloh."

"I let them mess with me," she says on our way to her apartment.

"Shut up, Shiloh."

My dirty sleeve clings to her clothes. Her cheeks are tear-stained. She has to shower before going down to the police station and from there to her school.

The few people who cross our path avert their gazes. She looks sick. They don't want to look judgmental, I assume.

Win-win.

"It's the truth, though. I could've fought back."

"They tortured you. Manipulated you. A kid." We're getting closer to her apartment. Once we're there, I'll shower her, dress her, and send her off so I can repay my debt to Jerome and be done with it. "A defenseless kid."

"Or." She ignores me, her voice growing distant. "If I were like you, which is what I wish for our kids, I wouldn't have cared. Except I did. I did, and I ruined everything."

"You did care. You never gave up on me. You never gave up on yourself. You kept going because you cared about living and cared about us." I'm this close to raising my voice. This close to making a scene. Instead, I stop to look at her. "Hey."

"What?" She pouts, her bottom lip jutting out.

"Shiloh." I hold her close and release one hand to rub her lip and tug on it. "You're the only emotion I ever want to feel."

Her face crumples.

She's about to cry.

Bad timing. Bad fucking timing.

I catch a movement out of the corner of my eye and snap my head up.

Short, chubby man. Gray hair. The way he fumbles with his car keys.

“Dr. Reynolds,” I whisper close to her ear.

“Oh, shit. Put me down. Put me down!” She shoves at me, scrambling to get off.

I don’t argue. Behind a building that hides us from him is where I lower her to the floor. She swipes at her dried tears. Straightens up. Steely resolve takes over her expression.

“You have to promise me, Kaleb. You have to promise you’re not going to get caught on your *mission* today.” Her tone, combined with her hands on her hips, is so fucking adorable. “You’ll repay the favor to your friend and go straight to that apartment you live in. You’ll wait there for me. And under no circumstances, don’t kill your doctor. Just don’t. I’ve got this.”

“I promise. But don’t think that I’m not coming back for you.” She’s hot when she sasses. When she thinks she has the upper hand. When she has no idea what I have planned for her today. “Go.”

Her blue, clever gaze studies me for another long minute. “Kaleb. Swear.”

“Swear.”

Shiloh sees the lie for what it is. She growls and lifts to kiss my cheek, regardless.

I grip her chin and claim her mouth, puke and all.

As long as there’s no Plan B in there, I’m good.

Never better.

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23

SHILOH

"Miss Talbot." A man with gray hair pushes his glasses up his nose and then waves at me.

Dr. Reynolds. Kaleb's therapist from *that* place.

My body is on high alert. The hair on the back of my neck stands on end.

Adrenaline has been soaking my blood since Kaleb caught me gulping down the Plan B pill. Since he told me about the hell he'd lived in.

Since I had to let him go. Out there. Where it isn't safe.

I'm a live wire, but since I can't let it show, I pretend to be someone I'm not.

Knowing that I'm burning up from the inside, I double down on the effort to relax my facial muscles.

Gotta fake it to win this round against a psychiatrist. A man trained to read people. Who's had years of experience.

A man who's obsessed with finding Kaleb.

He doesn't have to say that. It's blatantly obvious, given the fact that he's here. Outside my building. He drove hours to get here. To talk to me all by himself. No backup. No cops.

He doesn't want to catch Kaleb. He just wants him.

Shoulders pulled down, a soft smile plays on my lips. My thoughts go back to last night when I fell asleep in Kaleb's arms.

There it is. Warmth spreads through me. The tension in my muscles bleeds out. I must look sincere since he's smiling back at me.

“Who’s asking?” I’m close enough that I don’t have to raise my voice. I’m proud of myself for sounding casual, for being Kaleb’s protector.

“Dr. Maxwell Reynolds.” He pushes off his Honda, offering me his hand.

I accept it, shaking it once. When he’s quiet, I tilt my head. A silent question.

Who are you?

I’m not supposed to know that. I couldn’t contact Kaleb while he was locked up. Couldn’t visit. Couldn’t ask about him. Up until this week, I had no idea what his primary psychiatrist’s name was.

“I’m sorry, where are my manners? I haven’t introduced myself.” Two can play this game, it seems. He pretends this is awkward.

Trying to trick me into being at ease around him.

Never.

His chubby hands smooth over his beige suede jacket. They pat over his gray pants in a nervous gesture.

This quirky, sweet old man act isn’t fooling me. Not when his blue eyes jump around the street, lingering on the building where I live. On the first floor.

Raising my eyebrows, I stick my hands in my pockets. We’re taught not to talk to strangers. For all he knows, he’s a stranger to me.

“Right, I’ll get to it.” His smile widens as his eyes study me. “I’m your brother’s psychiatrist. I work at Berkshire.”

“Oh.” I let my bottom lip hang loose. Let my breath shudder.

A frightened woman would react that way. She’d also need to hide, so I hug my arms around my waist. I do my best even though the lie is lodged in my throat, a huge, uncomfortable lump.

“Do you”—my eyes widen as fake realization dawns on me—“think he’s here? In the city?”

“Miss Talbot.” He presses his glasses up his nose again, his forehead creasing. Whatever he’s searching for, he won’t find it in my expression. “Maybe this isn’t the best place to discuss this? Your home could be better for this type of conversation. You live here, right? At least that’s the information I got from your father.”

This time, my surprise is very fucking real. “You talked to my dad? He told you where I live?”

“Now, now.” His appeasing tone isn’t appeasing me one bit. “There’s no need to get all riled up. He’s worried about you. Everyone is.”

Liar.

My dad worries about one person and one person only. Himself. He doesn’t even care about Kaleb’s mom. He keeps her around for appearance’s sake. His trophy wife.

“You promised him information about me in return, didn’t you?” It’s a hardship to remain calm. To pretend to look scared on top of it. I do it for Kaleb, sneaking glances to the sides. Behind me. “Something good. Something that’ll get me committed.”

Dr. Reynolds eats my act up. His expression softens, forehead smoothing. He clutches onto his shoulder bag.

“Yes. But…” I made him feel at ease, and, in turn, he opened up to me. “I’m afraid that I wasn’t being completely honest with your father. While you’re not my patient, Kaleb is. My most interesting case. Any information I obtain about him is mine.”

Mine.

My hackles rise at his choice of words.

Kaleb is my man. My brother. My soulmate.

He isn’t some circus freak. He isn’t a case study.

The need to bash his therapist’s head against the hood of his car is intense.

“Well, he’s not here. I have no idea where he is.”

“You could be the key to finding him.” My mouth opens to repeat that I have no idea where he is. Dr. Reynolds raises a hand, smile widening. It’s annoying. Condescending. “Rest assured that what we’ll discuss will remain strictly between us.”

“If he ever showed up, it would be my death sentence.” The words flow easily out of me. They’re not really a lie. For a while, I believed them. “He has to hate me for what I did to him. Letting him rot in there. It’s well within his rights. I deserve his hate.”

“That’s where you’re wrong.” He approaches me. Closes in on me. A whiff of his cologne has my stomach roiling. He’s a man, and he’s standing too close to me. I back up. “Could we continue this conversation inside? I won’t hurt you. You have my word. All I’m asking for is a few minutes of your time.”

He won’t let this go, persistent fuck. I’m wrung out. Upset. Worried about Kaleb, where he is, if he’s safe.

There are so many things on my to-do list today. I don’t have time for this.

Then again, if I don’t talk to him, will he report back to my dad? Will he ask for backup, hint that I’m hiding Kaleb so he can have an excuse to call more PIs?

He might.

Okay. Fuck. I’ll have to let him in.

Good thing Kaleb hasn’t left anything in my apartment. I was there less than an hour ago, and my home looked the same as always. Organized. Clean. Mine.

And as much as the thought of having a strange man alone in my home makes my skin crawl, I’m not truly scared of Dr. Reynolds. He wouldn’t hurt me.

He’s been studying Kaleb for over a decade. He must’ve seen my photos. Dug up information about our case. He knows you don’t fuck with the love of this serial killer’s life.

Just in case he gets too close again, I have my knives at home.

“I have to head out to the police station before I go to class.” Lying would get me absolutely nowhere. He’ll see it on my face and figure out I’ve been untruthful. Then, what else am I hiding, right? Better let it all out. Like, everything. “My phone’s not on me, but I have to make some calls too. Get back to Dad’s lawyers. My professor was murdered last night. I was a witness. So…”

Nothing I say surprises Kaleb’s therapist. The news must’ve hit the internet. And since my theory about his obsession with Kaleb is apparently on point, he has to know the dead professor used to be my teacher.

My blood runs cold. He could be dangerous. Kidnap me or—No. No. I circle back to my former conclusion. There’s no way he’d be so reckless and try anything with me.

Hurting me in any capacity would only serve to get him a knife between the ribs, not information.

Silently, we head inside the building. I stay at a safe distance behind him. I can’t let him smell my breath. Can’t walk ahead of him, where I can’t see him.

He doesn’t argue when I signal for him to head up first. No wonder there. He knows I’m a sexual assault survivor. He’s dug into our pasts, that psycho. He treats me as such.

Goddamn it. Goddamn my father for sending this stalker my way.

As we climb the stairs, I think this through.

Dad must’ve figured out that Kaleb’s doctor had an ulterior motive for coming out here. That he’d be writing a book or publishing a study about us.

He’s figured it out, and he’s still using him. Meaning he’ll get rid of him once Dr. Reynolds brings Kaleb on a silver platter. Meaning that his ex-PI hasn’t been doing a good enough job.

He’s getting restless. He might send a new PI here and soon.

Three days. Kaleb promised that after Halloween, we’re out of here. I have to trust him.

I do trust him.

Once we’re at the door, Dr. Reynolds steps aside, allowing me to open it without crowding my space.

Had it been anyone else, I’d have appreciated his kindness. Seeing it’s this probing asshole, I despise the gesture, much like I loathe everything else about him.

“Can I get you anything?” I ask, making a beeline toward the kitchen.

“No, thank you.”

By the time his voice reaches me, I already have gum shoved in my mouth.

His footsteps echo around the apartment while I curl my fingers around one of the pocketknives I have stashed in my kitchen drawers. I put it in the pocket of my coat.

My insurance policy.

When my breath no longer smells acrid, I spit out the gum and join Dr. Reynolds in my living room. He’s standing there, hands folded in front of him, his stance relaxed.

But his eyes. They bounce around the room. Probing. Searching for any evidence that Kaleb’s been here.

My placid expression is about to crack.

Hold on.

“Please, have a seat.” I lower myself to one couch, gesturing for him to take the other one.

When he’s sitting, he rolls his shoulders. Clears his throat and affixes his stare on me. “I’ll start by reassuring you a second time that Kaleb isn’t out there to kill you.”

“What makes you so sure?” I’m eager to get him out of here. Get this over with. I also need him to reveal his cards. “He’d never been big on talking when we lived together. I can’t imagine him opening up to you. Being that explicit.”

“You’re right. He hadn’t been that open. Hadn’t changed throughout the years he spent at Berkshire.” It’s obvious that he’s itching to take another glance at my apartment. His fingers tap his lap incessantly. “However, I was able to observe him during that period. He was the only one who had a few privileges the others never had. Just so I could learn more about him.”

That prick. He played Kaleb. He let him hold onto my pictures. To the new mask. All so he could see how the *animal* would react. I bite my tongue. It’s all I can do not to scream.

“Privileges?” I ask while every muscle in my body flexes. My desperate attempt to stay put instead of jumping forward and plucking out his eyes. “What were they? What do they have to do with me?”

“The mask, clearly. I brought him that one myself.” His chest puffs a tiny bit. “He let me ask him two questions for the privilege of keeping it. What it felt like to kill those kids. What he did right after.”

I’m intrigued, but not that intrigued to hear the answers from this guy. I’ll hear it from Kaleb.

My Kaleb.

I clutch the knife in my palm, playing with the thumb stud. One push and the sharp blade pops out, ready to party.

His eyes flicker to my hidden hand, and he nods to himself. “Other than the mask, there were the photos. Yours.”

“What?” My eyes go wide.

It’s the proper expression when hearing shocking news. I hope to God he believes it. That I can become better at lying for Kaleb’s sake.

“Yes, a former patient snuck them past our security. On my orders.”

“Another patient?” Though there’s nothing I want more than to slit his throat, I release my knife, and hug my middle, same as I did out on the sidewalk. “Someone else is after me?”

“Don’t be alarmed. If Kaleb’s accomplice wanted you dead, you’d be dead by now.” A small, reassuring smile to assuage my fears. “What I’m

trying to say is that Kaleb loved those photos. Was attached to them. That was how I learned more about him. And consequently, you."

Calm down. Calm down. Calm the fuck down. You have a full day ahead of you. Shit you have to take care of. None of it includes killing this fucker and hiding the body for treating Kaleb like a lab rat.

This does nothing to soothe my bubbling rage.

So I think about Kaleb.

I imagine him here, in my apartment. Gladly helping me murder his therapist just because I asked him to.

The two of us, Kaleb and me, wielding sharp knives in our hands.

Digging them into his flesh.

Ditching the body where we'd leave it to rot.

Together.

Endorphins simmer in my blood, and I suppress a smile.

"What truly taught me how deep his attachment to you runs was when the photos were stolen from him. Numerous times, unfortunately, despite my constant reprimands."

The short moment of bliss has been snatched away from under me by Dr. Reynolds. Someone touched Kaleb's things. Someone taunted him.

Holy shit. So, this is what Kaleb must have felt yesterday when he watched my professor threaten me.

Rapid heartbeats. Burning lungs.

A powerful urge to destroy whatever's in my path.

I won't lose control. I won't let them tear us apart.

Never again.

"I cautioned the guard multiple times over the years." His eyebrows draw together, lips pursing. He isn't lying. He didn't approve of the bullying, even for the sake of his little science project. "Sadly, his uncle runs the hospital. I had no say in the matter of his employment. Kaleb despised him, and I didn't stop him from retaliating. He'd beat him up and only then did I intervene. I had to fight tooth and nail to keep Kaleb at Berkshire after each time he beat up Dick, the guard. I warned them Kaleb could escape had we moved him. That he could retaliate. I wasn't wrong."

He pauses.

My gut tells me his story isn't over. I wait until he starts talking again.

"They ate it up. Then I had to convince them otherwise when your stepbrother asked for a short trip outside. He swore to cooperate if I just

gave him this. I had to, and the board believed me when I said it was necessary." A sigh. "It pained me greatly to hear of his disappearance. Less so that the abusive guard died as a result."

I fight another smile, so fucking proud that Kaleb had gotten his revenge on the motherfucker.

"Long story short, I guarantee you, Miss Talbot, you have nothing to worry about. Death is not what he has planned for you."

Not true. There are seconds, minutes even, that Kaleb fantasizes about killing me.

His eyes go dark, bleak, and painfully honest. His murderous desires bleed out of them. He doesn't hate me, that's not it.

He's curious. Wants to know how easily he could squeeze the life out of me.

He'll never admit to that. He'll never do it.

But he thinks about it.

What's stopping him is his love for me.

My stepbrother demands an eternity together. A disturbing ever after. He wants to consume me. Defile me. Swallow me whole.

Belonging to him means dying and being brought back from the dead every single day for the rest of my life.

Me and our future family.

I tighten my hold around my middle.

Rationally, I'm aware that I'm not pregnant right now. It's biologically impossible for it to happen.

Emotionally, I see—no, *feel*—our future as it unfolds before my eyes.

"Considering what I just told you, what are your thoughts on the subject?"

Oh, hell no.

The only reason Kaleb's therapist is here is to get him off my back, not *this*. This probing.

How dare he.

"I'm going to stop you right there." My voice breaks on purpose. Anything to protect Kaleb. Anything to keep the world's grubby, undeserving paws off him. "Since you've contacted my father and probably researched our family, I assume you've also looked into my background. You know I majored in psychology. That I'm pursuing my master's degree these days."

“Correct.” His honesty brings me relief. Just a little.

I dip my chin. “You can’t analyze me, Dr. Reynolds. Not without my consent.”

My hand is back in my pocket. The knife is hot in my grip and begs me to put it to good use. No. I have things to take care of. Dealing with Reynolds’s corpse isn’t one of them.

Later. Later.

“I—”

“I’m not your patient. I’m not here to entertain you. Nothing about this story is entertaining. You should be ashamed of yourself.”

My gaze hardens as I think of my stepbrother. About the years he’d been subjected to this man.

The lack of privacy. Being probed and interrogated. Stripped of his humanity. Treated like a case subject instead of a person.

The ache in my chest is like no other. My heart twists. Sinks. Splits down the middle.

Kaleb said he didn’t mind being there so long that he knew I was safe.

Bullshit.

I’ve been under this Peeping Tom’s magnifying glass for less than five minutes and already my skin crawls.

On top of that, he taunted Kaleb for loving me. Un-fucking-acceptable.

“You have to tell me.” Reynolds’s voice grows urgent. He leans forward in his seat. His desire to analyze and learn about our lives is now written all over his face. “About your connection. His motivations. Did you notice his violent nature before he murdered those two boys? Or was it his father’s unsolved death?”

Unsolved?

There’s pressure in my temples. A black spot in my memory that hides something. Something’s repressed back there. I focus, but it’s still black. Still hidden.

Whatever.

I school my features into what I hope is an unreadable expression. No need for Dr. Reynolds to see he caught me unprepared.

Fuck Kaleb’s dad. I never researched what happened to that bastard. I was young, and then I didn’t care.

Maybe I should’ve.

No. Absolutely not.

There are answers out there. I'll have them.

From Kaleb.

"You're out of line." As soon as I get up, his eyes plead with me to reconsider. I point my finger at him. "You're not welcome here anymore. Not in my home. Not anywhere near me. I'll be seeing my father's attorneys today. Leave now, or I'll ask them to file a restraining order against you."

"Miss Talbot. Please." He presses his hands together as he rises from the couch. "Kaleb Blackwood is one of a kind. Some therapists will never encounter anything like him throughout their entire career. You must talk to me. You must let me stay here until he comes. I'm begging you."

If catching fire was a real thing, I'd have gone up in flames at his words. I'm doing everything in my power to conceal my anger. Everything.

The burning righteousness sears my bones. It hurts. Oh, how it hurts to swallow it down.

For him. Everything for him.

"Get. Out." I'm losing control. Before I can stop myself, I pull out the pocketknife, aiming the blade at him. "Get the fuck out. You ever come near me again, and I'll kill you. Trust that I have plenty of money and pull around the city to cover it up."

He must think that Dad asked for intel out of his love and concern for me. He must believe that he'd help cover up his murder. It's evident in how he flinches and backs up in the direction of the door.

"Kaleb hasn't been here." I watch him like a hawk as he crosses my living room, walking backward. "If he shows up, I'll be the first to tell him to get out of town. Out of the country. It's bad enough that someone murdered my teacher—"

"It could've been him," he whispers, excitement flashing in his eyes.

"No."

"You sure?"

I scoff at him. "I would've recognized my stepbrother."

"It's been years."

"He isn't fucking short, is he?"

That gives the snooping prick pause. "No, he isn't."

"Get out. Send me a selfie of you in front of Berkshire's gates, holding today's paper in the next ten hours, or I'm sending a hitman to kill you." I

rattle off my number, which he punches into his phone with trembling fingers.

Silence ensues.

His hand is on the handle of my front door. He isn't as scared as I need him to be. Isn't running away fast enough.

What would Kaleb do?

Oh, yes. *That*.

With the knife still held up in front of me, I cock my head to the side.

"I'll text you, I promise." *Jackpot*. He yanks the door open, his feet scuffing on the floor as he steps out into the hall. Reaches to the inside of his jacket. "Here's my card, in case you ever change your mind."

I give him an impatient look, reminding him he could text me his number. I don't want anything of his inside my home.

"Yes. Yes. You'll have my number." His lips quirk in a tentative smile. "Maybe one more question?"

"Out," I say in a hushed voice that does wonders to get him out of my life.

Dr. Reynolds shuts the door in my face. I hear him running across the hall.

Good fucking riddance.

I wish I could say that the worst part of the day is behind me.

It isn't.

My landline rings. Dad's assistant is on the line, connecting the call to his lawyers so they can tell me the exact time I need to be at the police station.

Yes, I'll be there in an hour. Fine, we'll be in and out of there before I know it.

Dad's orders, they say.

I won't be made into a spectacle, they promise.

I tell them *yes*, *sure*, and *I'll see you there*.

I'll give my statement. I'll go to my classes.

For Kaleb.

I'll let him have it. Let him play cat and mouse with me.

After Halloween, we'll be gone.

Until then, we'll lie, cheat, and steal to get by.

Probably kill, too.

And I'll make damn sure we'll never get caught.

Ever.

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24

KALEB

A man's name—Brian Perry. His description. Address. When he should be home. Whether he'll be alone or not. The best times to pay him a visit.

That was the information Jerome sent me.

What I need to complete this job for him.

So here I fucking am. Here, on the other side of the city. Away from Shiloh, sometime before noon. After I snuck behind the bushes, *Wren reported* to her father that, in fact, there was nothing to report.

The air smells of the rain that just ended a second ago. But its scent is mild and hardly traceable. The real scent I pick up on doesn't come from outside.

It's from somewhere deep within me.

Remorse. I'm drowning in it, and it smells putrid and nauseating. Fucking corrosive.

Leaving Shiloh alone after being ambushed by Dr. Reynolds is eating me alive.

I would've stayed. Stalked them. I would've killed him against her wishes if he so much as looked at her for too long.

Instead, I have to be here and pay what's due to Jerome.

Life hardly ever goes my way.

What comforts me is that I'll be back to stalking her by the time she heads out to the police station.

What comforts me is the echo of her voice.

They’d be better off having your genes. Being a carbon copy of you. Don’t give me that look. Of course I want them to be like you, Kaleb.

Those words. Spoken through plump, abused lips. In the sincerest tone.

The things they did to my heart.

The way she keeps changing me.

Our revenge will be finalized soon. Then, I won’t let her out of my sight. Sunrise to sundown. That’s how long I’ll stare at her. Hold her. Look at her while she showers. While she has no idea I’m there—just outside, watching her.

Stalking her.

I’ll roll out from under the bed while she sleeps. Wait for her to wake up, grab her delicate ankle, and drag her down there with me. Do filthy, inconceivable things to her.

After I’m done here.

Getting to Brian Perry, the poor janitor who works the graveyard shift, has my undivided attention.

His doorstep is nothing special.

One welcome mat on the floor. Patches of green and dark mold on the ceiling.

A cheap lock.

Killing him won’t cost me a damn thing. My conscience won’t suffer. I won’t shed a tear over him.

I don’t know what he did to deserve it.

Couldn’t give a fuck less.

This is the price of doing business.

Of having Shiloh’s pictures with me at Berkshire.

Before meeting her, I’d never been alone or lonely. These concepts had been foreign to me, much like love and attachment.

But once I moved in and became her stepbrother, my life had never been the same. She was mine. I couldn’t breathe—couldn’t survive—without her.

Needing her was awful. That human emotion damn near destroyed me. I endured it. I wouldn’t swallow their meds. They’d make me foggy. They would’ve fucked with my memories of her.

I tricked them. And I had Jerome fill in the void with her pictures and information about her whereabouts.

If ending a person’s life is the price I have to pay, so be it.

What’s one less person on this overpopulated earth, anyway?

In the grand scheme of things, Brian Perry’s existence makes no difference whatsoever.

I pull my gloved hands out of my hoodie pockets. After texting Shiloh’s dad, I dropped by my apartment and changed into my jeans. Grabbed the gloves, two paper clips and here I am.

My weapon choice for today, that part I leave up to fate. Whatever I find in this man’s home will have to do.

It’s still daytime. I can’t just walk around with a butcher’s knife or a baseball bat around the city. I even left my mask at home.

The things I do for Shiloh.

Click, click, click.

I pick the lock at record speed.

Thank you, Shiloh’s dad, for being a bastard and locking her up in her room some days.

My mark launches himself at the door when I push it open. He’s already closer than I would’ve liked.

“Who the fuck are you?” His hand slams on the door. An attempt to close it.

Futile attempt.

My foot blocks him.

“What the—” he starts.

Never finishes.

I shoulder my way inside his apartment. The force of the blow almost sends his body flying into the air. He lands on the floor, skinny and useless.

Shock renders him silent while I reach behind me to flip the lock.

The *click* wakes him back up. He opens his mouth to scream, his brown eyes bulging.

I get it. It’s not every day that a six-foot-five lean guy picks your lock and breaks into your apartment.

But I can’t let him make a sound.

I’m on my knees, my hand covering his mouth. His eyebrows fly up his forehead. The look he’s giving me is manic, fingers raising to claw at my forearm.

One shake of my head and he stops screaming into my palm. Stops fighting.

Poor idiot. He thinks it's some kind of code to *be quiet and you might live another day*.

I haul the blond man up to his feet, dragging him to the small kitchen to our left.

It's kind of sad how empty his apartment is.

Upsetting too. I meant for it to look like a burglary gone wrong, not a contract murder.

His living room consists of a worn-out gray and white rug. One coffee table, one side table. I think they've been here since the beginning of time. As well as the three empty whiskey glasses scattered on them.

A TV hangs from the wall, but who steals those anymore?

No one. That's who. Definitely not me. It would get me unwanted attention, walking around with that crap.

I'll have to snoop through his bedroom later.

"Mmm. Mmm." My victim reminds me of his existence.

I feel nothing for my target.

He's just another task keeping me away from what I'm truly after.

Shiloh.

Her. Everything revolves around her.

Fortunately for Brian. Missing Shiloh means I won't spend hours torturing him to death.

We're by his kitchen counter, and I turn to grab the first knife I can reach in his top drawer.

One second, the blade's in the air.

His blue eyes tear up, horror bleeding from them. Horror, but no confusion.

Though I have no idea why I'm killing this person, he does.

I'm not even mildly curious enough to remove my hand from his mouth and find out.

Tears spring down his cheeks when I sink the knife between his ribs. Blood sprays down his gray shirt as soon as I pull it out. He howls into my gloved palm, his body thrashing against me.

I have one hundred pounds of muscle on him, easy. He isn't going anywhere.

Four more stabs and a whole lot of blood later, Brian's body is nothing more than a bag of bones. He's heavier than he was a second ago. All quiet now.

The knife clangs when I dump it in the sink. I slide Brian’s body down to the floor and get to business.

Taking off my gloves, I shove them into the pocket of my hoodie, then retrieve a second pair from my jeans.

Jerome asked for proof that I finished the job so, *snap* and there, he has it. I step over the dead guy’s body and search for his wallet around the house. The easiest thing to steal.

Brian has been kind enough to leave it on his couch so I don’t have to waste time rifling through his room.

Thanks, I guess.

One debit card and two twenties are what I take with me. I throw them in the closest trash can as soon as I’m out in the street.

I draw the hood back up on my head and leave to get to her.

I’m a monster. A ghost.

I’m done.

I MAKE it just in time to catch her stepping out of her building.

Just in time to stand there, seen and unseen, as my heart stops.

Would you look at her.

She’s gorgeous, as always. In her sleep. When she cries. When she comes.

And now. Like this, wearing black eyeliner framing her blue eyes, giving a dark edge to my dark queen.

Elegant. Royalty. Ready to put the entire police station in its place.

That’s why she’s wearing a sharp white blouse, a black blazer, and a black skirt, and a form-fitting black peacoat that she left unbuttoned. Those black high heels and the leather bag slung over her shoulder look expensive.

I don’t care about money. The way her clothes fall on her, though…

Her coat opens as the breeze blows around Shiloh, and I’m eating it up. *Her*. The clothes that accentuate each curve and slope of her body. I hardly contain a growl when her hair whips around her, reminding me of what she’s been hiding.

Her scar.

Anger rises. Anger simmers.

Her dad will pay.

Can’t blow my cover. Can’t ruin this.

Our game.

Before she gets into her SUV, her eyes scan the street.

She’s looking for me.

She won’t find me. It warms my wretched soul that she tries.

Warms me further when she starts driving and heads straight to the police station rather than buying another Plan B pill. I follow her, navigating through traffic. Maintaining a four-car distance between us.

Three lawyers wait for her outside the station. Surprise, surprise, neither one of our parents is there to accompany her.

At least she has professionals by her side. I wait for her while she’s in there, and in less than an hour, she’s out. As cool and collected as she was when she stepped in there.

A few nods to the lawyers, and she’s back on the road.

With me as her stalker.

It’s when we near her college that I get as far away from her as I can. I don’t have to see her to know where she’s going. And though I stalked her over the last couple of days, I’m staying here until it’s time for my surprise visit this afternoon.

Once I’ve bought the things I need to have fun with my Shiloh, I slip back into my car.

Count the seconds, minutes, hours.

Eventually, they go by.

The sun sets in the sky. The mask that I brought from home is calling me. I collect everything I need and shove it in my hoodie pocket.

The corners of my lips curve up.

This day might’ve started slow. Frustrating. Painful.

It won’t end that way.

I can guarantee it won’t.

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SHILOH

A trembling hand lands on my shoulder. I shove my laptop into my bag, turning to Eddy. “Miss—Miss Talbot?”

Strange. He never calls me Miss Talbot. Always by my first name. Even when he took over for Dempsey earlier in class today, a little over two hours ago.

Always Shiloh.

What’s he doing here, anyway? Class is over. I want him gone.

I’m so ready to go home. To Kaleb.

I mean, he’s here, on the campus grounds, no question about it.

I’ve felt his eyes on me for the past hour or so.

Goosebumps have pricked my skin. The back of my neck has been burning up.

It’s thrilling.

My worries about getting caught are gone.

We’re basically safe.

I did that. I made sure we would be, that no one was out there searching for Kaleb.

First, I managed to sound cool and collected when I gave my version of events to the police. I lied through my teeth about the short man who killed my professor. Forced tears out when I got to the *hard* parts.

Dad’s lawyers argued with the detectives, but eventually, I was promised that this would be my last interview about the subject. They also

informed me that he was on a short trip with Kaleb's mom. He'd be back home on Halloween. That was why he couldn't be there.

Talk about strange timing. It's as if Kaleb had a hand in getting them back here on the date he wants to kill them.

Which is impossible. I think.

They handed me back my phone while I smiled on the inside, happy that Kaleb would get his wish, killing our parents on that day. Then I did some more damage control and calmed Val for the hundredth time.

At college, no one suspected I had anything to do with Dempsey's death. On the contrary. My classmates and teachers were compassionate. Soft smiles. A pat on my shoulder.

It must have been awful.

Yes, yes, it was. Poor Professor Dempsey.

They consoled me while excitement buzzed under my skin.

Kaleb. The future that awaits us. The fact that I can keep him safe. Free.

When I get home, he'll still be there to mark my skin again. Claim my three holes. Yes.

Soon. Once Eddy is out of the way.

"Miss Talbot." His voice breaks, face pales.

My hackles rise. Swear to God, this better not be another conversation about Kaleb.

He better not be threatening me to expose Kaleb. Asking for my permission to report him.

It takes all of my concentration to sling my bag over my shoulder instead of bashing it into Eddy's head. "What do you want?"

Terrified, light gray eyes stare at me. His body trembles beneath his red and black plaid sweater.

"Eddy." My pulse skyrockets. "What have you done?"

Before he gets to answer, I curl my fingers around the collar of his sweater. I could snap his neck so. Fucking. Easily.

We're the only two people left in the room. No one else is here to stop me.

"N-n-n—"

"You ratted him out?"

"No," he blurts out. His trembling intensifies. "I came to tell you that y-y-you've got to stay today."

“Stay for what?” I pull my lips in, pushing the worst-case scenarios out of my head. This has nothing to do with Kaleb. He’s just scared of me. I think.

“S-someone—” He’s grown a shade paler, almost translucent now. “For the clinical practice hours. Well. One hour. Just one. A volunteer has asked specifically for you.”

Eddy stares at me. I stare back.

The information sinks in.

A volunteer.

“Fuck.” I release Eddy.

The force of my frustration makes him stumble back. I pinch the bridge of my nose and suck in a deep breath.

I can’t say that I hate it. I can’t deny that I’m wet for it.

A game.

A sex game.

I’m sick for thinking this would be a good idea.

Even sicker for being okay with him risking his freedom over this.

“Fuck.” I lower my voice, hissing. “I—He—”

“He? I have no idea who this person is,” Eddy screeches. He’s a terrible liar. Worse than I am.

“Eddy.” Tremors rack his body the longer I stare him down. “Repeat what you just said. Make it believable.”

His eyes lose focus, eyebrows lowering in confusion. “I’m sorry?”

“Who’s the volunteer? Who’s been asking for me?” Each word is delivered in a low, menacing voice.

“Oh.” He blinks, nodding frantically as the meaning behind my question registers. “Of course.” He clears his throat and stands an inch taller. “No idea who’s in there. A stranger who emailed Professor Dempsey. Jakob White. That’s his name. That’s all I know. We had someone walk him out of campus after the clinical practice last night, so there’s no way he could’ve killed—”

“Enough,” I snap at him. His lips slam together. “Too much detail is just as incriminating. Short and to the point, okay? Again.”

“You’re absolutely right.” He rolls his shoulders. Fixes his features into a neutral expression. But he still looks like a coward to me. “No idea who’s in there. All I have is a name. Jakob White. A volunteer.”

“Good.” It’ll have to do.

“You gave them another description, right?” When my nostrils flare, Eddy staggers back another few steps, his back hitting the wall. “Don’t—don’t come any closer. I’m just saying it’ll help. Knowing what they’re looking for.”

“Short and stocky. Couldn’t remember anything else.” I sneer as I stride past him. “If you’ll excuse me, my patient is waiting for me.”

Our second and last session.

Our version of exhibitionism.

He’ll be okay. I trust him.

I repeat that to myself as I cross the hall to the clinic. Electricity pulses through me, short, thrilling jolts that make breathing hard.

I breathe, anyway. I’m alive. Awake. In my most primal state.

The level-headed version of me would’ve turned around and left. Stormed outside of campus grounds.

She would’ve waited for Kaleb to realize she wasn’t coming. Stayed home until he broke in and took her there. Behind a locked door. In the privacy of her home, where it’s safe.

I’m way past being level headed. Past being civilized.

I want him.

I’m taking him.

Plain and fucking simple.

Eddy drags his feet behind me. He only appears next to me when we get to the viewing area.

Hushed murmurs filter through the viewing room, getting louder when I open the door.

Seriously? Again with this?

Professor Dempsey is gone. It should be obvious to everyone that I’m not here because I slept with him.

It should be, yet here they are, huddled together. Shutting up as soon as they notice me.

Fuck them. I don’t care what they think about me. I glower at the three of them.

The two men, dressed in classic pants and button-down shirts, aren’t familiar. I do remember the woman.

She was here yesterday. Tall, her slender figure swallowed up under her large, white, wool sweatshirt and oversized jeans. Her long, slick black hair falls down her back.

Her brown eyes shoot daggers at me.

Accusing me of Professor Dempsey's death.

Let her, a voice inside me that sounds a lot like Kaleb says. *She can't do anything about it. There's no proof.*

The voice is right.

Whatever, my gaze answers her as I stroll past her.

None of these people matter. The only person who does isn't in this room.

He's in the guest waiting area.

Expecting me.

Butterflies assault my stomach as I open the door to the clinic. I hear Eddy gathering the students, his voice less shaky than it was before. Thank fuck. It gives me hope that he won't mess up if and when he's ever questioned again.

One less thing to worry about.

The door clicks shut behind me, and I forget about everything. My heart flutters in my chest. Desire and excitement make me heady.

On the outside, I'm the picture of calm, putting my bag on the side table. Shrugging off my coat.

On the inside, I'm two seconds from screaming with excitement. Sexual energy runs through my body.

I thought I wanted the practice hours to be better equipped to help Kaleb and me. I was wrong.

We don't need anyone.

We're perfect the way we are.

Kinky and fucked-up and us.

I just have to make sure neither Kaleb nor I slip up today.

As long as his identity remains a secret, we're good.

My gait is long and confident as I cross the room. Hand on the door handle. I press it.

Holy shit. This is really happening.

I pull it open. "Mr. White."

He's arresting. There's no other word to describe him. Tall and intimidating, filling up the doorframe. His hoodie and jeans accentuate his lean muscles.

The clothes aren't anything special. This isn't even the first time I've seen him today.

He steals my breath away, regardless.

It's him. And the mask.

God, he's gorgeous. I stare at him beneath my lashes. At the black pools of his eyes.

I'm drawn to them. I'm getting lost in them.

He says nothing, sticking to his act.

His piercing glare and ominous silence get me hotter. Needier.

What are you doing, being quiet like that?

Right.

"Please, come in." I step back, allowing him to enter the room.

"Hmm." He heads straight to the chair he occupied the day before.

He sits there, hands on his knees, shoulders pulled back.

His demeanor betrays nothing. No flicker of regret or apprehension for what he'd done to Professor Dempsey shows on him. It's admirable. I could look at him for hours.

But this isn't a game if I'm not playing.

I lower myself into my seat, crossing my legs. A new legal pad and pen were left for me on the second side table, and I pick them up. Click on the pen. Affix my gaze to Kaleb.

"Mr.—"

"Jakob."

No formalities, then, just like last time. I roll the pen between my fingers, working through the jitters. The excitement of the unknown.

"Jakob." Even his fake name tastes sweet on my tongue. Decadent.

Tempting.

Is he as turned on as I am? I let my eyes wander down the length of his body, biting my bottom lip the lower my gaze goes. His cock must be hard in his jeans, and I'm dying to see it. My mouth waters for it.

But I don't get as low as I would've liked.

A bump in the pocket of his hoodie grabs my attention.

He's brought something to our session.

Before I let my curiosity get the better of me—before I ruin this game—I return to stare at his mask.

I clear my throat that's filled with emotions. With need. "First, I'd like to apologize for yesterday."

He shakes his head. Once.

It was the wrong thing to say.

He doesn’t need my apology.

I’m hyper-aware of the one-way mirror. Of other people watching us.

What comes out of my mouth next matters. Not for school purposes. Not for their approval.

It’s so I can stretch this out for Kaleb and me for as long as possible.

Turn this charade into something delicious.

I couldn’t appreciate what Kaleb did the first time he stepped inside this clinic. I can now.

We’ll reminisce about it for the rest of our lives.

Our long, carefree lives.

We’ll have it. We will.

“Something wrong, Jakob?”

He tilts his head. I swear I hear their bones shaking on the other side of this room.

“No apology.” Two words that spread heat through my body.

It’s impossible to stop my thighs from clenching.

“Okay.” I suck in a breath, my chest heating. My panties are ruined. I’ll do anything for him. For this game. Anything he asks. “What then?”

“Start over.”

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KALEB

Flustered. Shaken. Doe-eyed. Angry, too, somewhere beneath the layers of shock.

Her fingers grip her pen and legal pad hard. Hard enough to turn her knuckles white.

This.

This is what I imagined this afternoon would be like.

This and her evident trust.

There's not an ounce of reprimand in her expression. In her voice.

Even though I lied to her. Even though I returned to the scene of the crime.

Even though I'm putting so much on the line.

Shiloh plays along.

A testament to the fact that I've done right by her every step of the way.

She needed my rough treatment. My cruelty. The pain.

She needed to see she could count on me from now until forever, and I did that.

Nothing made sense to her before I returned to her life.

Now it does. Now the pieces have fallen into place.

This is the best jigsaw puzzle we have ever completed. Ever.

"Okay. I'll start over. But before we dive in, I have to point out that I'm a little out of my depth here." Her teeth sink into her plump bottom lip.

Others might mistake her behavior for shyness.

I see it for what it is.

Seduction.

Needless, really. I've been hard since I heard her heels clicking on the other side of the door. Throughout the entire goddamn day.

I tilt my head to the side, and she gasps.

"I'm alone here. My professor"—she presses her knuckles under her eye, pretending to shed a tear over the bastard—"was viciously murdered last night."

"I asked for you," I deadpan, making a point to her and all the other bastards who are watching that no one is better than Shiloh.

This isn't part of the game.

This is God's honest truth.

For me, she'll always be the smartest, sharpest, most perfect person in the room.

Always.

"Eddy, his TA, could assist me. I could call him in." Oh, I see what's happening here. My little sister is getting off on the affirmations. She's asking for more of my praise. "He's right outside."

"You." I have words to offer her. So many of them. I'll give her everything. Just not in the form of small talk. Of useless chit-chat.

She'll have to try harder.

She'll have to beg for it.

"Okay." She presses a hand to her throat. I itch to lean forward, curl my fingers around it, and order her to do it again so I can feel the air flowing through it. "Well, let's pick up where we left off yesterday. Just you and me."

Yes, just us. Forever.

As my silence fills the room, she scribbles, the pen running over her legal pad. My name. The date. Documenting our session as any good professional would.

My body rebelled whenever Dr. Reynolds did that. When he wrote shit about me as if he had a clue. That legal pad from hell. I fantasized about tearing the paper, crumpling each one. Shoving them down his throat.

About stopping him from documenting my life.

I'm a monster, not a lab rat.

With Shiloh, though, I welcome it. I'm ready, willing, and hard to have her learn every single thing there is to know about me.

Watching her in a position of power just adds to how turned on I am by her.

She takes our role-playing seriously, and it's hot as fuck.

"You mentioned your stepsister." A twinkle flashes in her eyes. An eyebrow lifts. She's up to something. "That you've been stalking her."

A nod.

It's a clipped, simple gesture. An impatient one.

My curiosity is overflowing. It's insufferable.

"Are you here because you need advice on how to approach her?" Shiloh nudges the pen between her hand and the legal pad, freeing up a hand.

To do what?

My teeth bite into the inside of my cheek when she starts to move. She leans forward, angling her body in a seductive way as she shrugs off her blazer.

Slowly.

Giving me a view of her cleavage as she slips off one sleeve. She changes her grip, pushing the other one down her arm.

Too soon, it's over.

But I have the hint of her tits engraved into my head. My mind fills in the rest. My mind remembers the red marks I left on her breasts.

"Guess again." My voice is hoarse. My need for her is worse than getting a kick to the gut.

I'm not equipped to deal with these emotions.

And she knows that.

Her lips quirk into a small, satisfied smirk. Her nipples push against the thin fabric of her blouse.

I'm going crazy over here, and it's maddening. It's also safe to be myself around her.

"Okay. So my second guess is that you're here to tell us about her. You met with her." Watching her pink tongue swipe along the lip she just bit has my pulse racing. My hands grip the armrests. "You have no one else to turn to, and you came to share. This is a safe space for you. I'm glad you…"

Her mouth is slightly agape. She sucks in a breath, and her breasts stretch her shirt.

"Came."

Jesus fuck. I've created a monster. A seductive, twisted fiend.

We’re different, she and I. Where I’m violence and destruction, she’s silence and apprehension. Where I’m bursting with hate, she’s the master of understanding.

There’s more to her, though. I’m dying to strip her of all her layers.

I’ll lose my mind while I’m dragging it out.

I huff, both annoyed and satisfied that she’s gotten under my skin.

“All right, then.” The thick mascara she applied accentuates the depths of her eyes. They’re fathomless.

I could spend a lifetime staring at those.

Shiloh won’t let me. Shiloh’s demanding that I look elsewhere by sliding a finger up the collar of her shirt. Slowly, she’s grazing the fabric. Tugging it down.

My cock has never been harder. Still doesn’t mean I’ll let her win. I press a hand to my thigh, running it higher and higher. Her eyes follow the movement.

Her cheeks burn red when I adjust the bulge in my jeans, her lips rounding into the shape of an O.

And I’m losing at my own game. Can’t stop thinking about shoving my fat cock in her mouth. Down her throat. Fucking can’t.

My brain is fried. That’s what it feels like. That’s what this need is. Complete destruction of my senses. Of my ability to control the situation.

“You’ve grown quiet,” she purrs, the sound reaching straight to my balls. “It’s counterproductive, you know, keeping things bottled up inside. Since you’re here, I’ll help you out with it. I’ll start, then, hopefully, it’ll be easier for you to share.”

Helping me in any capacity would be having her down on her knees. Between my legs. Sucking me off.

I say nothing.

“So, you and her were intimate last night. Am I right?”

The understatement of the century. I defiled you, brat, and I’ll do it a million times more.

I shrug.

“Could she tell you’d been stalking her? Was she expecting you?” Her finger slides along her collarbone. Going up, until her hand is on her chin, rubbing it seductively. Teasing her bottom lip.

The effort she puts into winning this game is going to be the death of me. She’s pushing my buttons. Begging to be punished.

She will.

She'll live to regret it.

Despite the frustration of losing this game, I'm eager to see where she takes this.

Another nod.

"Hmm. As the late Professor Dempsey said yesterday, it's reassuring." Her smirk stretches as her index finger rises to tease the area below her bottom lip. My cock jerks. "Hearing your relationship is consensual. You must have given her a heads-up. And since she agreed, she must've been wanting it for years. I assume she was…How do I phrase this? Professionally speaking?"

My clothes are too tight. My mask is suffocating me.

Get a fucking grip. You can't fuck her here. Can't end this game so soon.

I taste blood on my tongue. My teeth latch violently to my bottom lip to silence my frustrated groan.

To hell with my most basic desires. I'll beat her pretty, tight pussy with my cock later.

"Naked." Shiloh makes the word sound so vulgar. So crude. I'm speechless. Starving for what'll come out of her filthy mouth next. "She must've been out of her mind by the time you showed up. The anticipation. After years of saving herself, I bet she was already lying in bed when you showed up. No clothes on. Legs spread."

If Douchebag Dempsey were still alive, he would react.

He'd either scold her again or bend her over right here in front of everyone. He'd have turned into an animal.

He'd try, at least. Before I'd have both my thumbs up in his eye sockets to pop them out.

Alas, he's in the morgue and Eddy is here.

Eddy had a very good idea of who I was when I showed up today. The real me. Earlier today, he couldn't stitch two words together. While he was working on his laptop in his ten-by-ten office, I stomped in. Cast my long shadow over the miserable bastard.

He knew. And he hasn't called the campus security. Not the police.

I assume Shiloh had a hand in getting him to keep his mouth shut.

Which is precisely my point. He won't call anyone. Won't dare interrupt us.

No one's stopping Shiloh from running her filthy mouth.

“Was she? Saving herself?” The pad of her thumb tugs at her bottom lip. “I assumed she was a virgin, but I wasn’t sure.”

The silence on the other side of the wall is no more. Sounds. Murmurs. I ignore them all. Focus on her.

And nod.

“Good, we’re making progress. I see that I was wrong before. You aren’t here to share.” Her eyelashes flutter. She presses her fingertips to her lips briefly then gasps.

My fingers flex on my thighs, my lungs expand.

I jerk my chin, motioning her to go on. See where she’s going with this.

“You feel guilty about making her bleed.”

I growl at the memories she evokes. My soaked cock. Her hymen. Fuck.

She hums softly, running a hand over the side of her thigh. Inches from where I cut her. She can’t reach the backs of her legs when she’s seated in this position. I bet she wishes she could.

I’m dying over here.

“Getting off on the blood, you’re tormented about it too.” Her voice grows hoarse, breathy. “It bothers you, this newfound obsession. Her blood. Am I close?”

This is it. The tipping point.

I can’t let this go on like this anymore.

“Kind of.” I straighten in my seat, becoming an active participant in my own game. Fighting back. “But not quite.”

“Oh?” She rounds her tempting lips again, her body leaning toward mine.

Let’s see if she can take it as well as she gives.

“There was more to it. The hunt, that’s what got me off. I hid under her bed while she undressed.” The fantasy is part fake, part what actually happened between us. My pierced, throbbing cock, however, is very real, and I cup it. Reminding her I shoved it into all of her three holes. “She left her bathroom door open. Put one delicate foot up on the sink to shave her cunt. That’s what tipped me off. That’s how I knew she’d been waiting for me.”

Up until now, Shiloh’s had it under control.

I’ve ruined it for her.

She changes the cross of her legs as her breathing grows labored. I’m pretty sure she has no idea she’s licking her lips.

“The razor slid so prettily over her pussy. Then she moaned. A soft sound, like the one she lets slip now.” I imitate the sounds Shiloh makes when I lick her. Suck her. Pound into her.

The voices in the other room are silent.

“Jakob. Um. Yes, this is progress. It’s great.” My sexy therapist’s sanity is tearing at the seams. Her pupils are huge. “Although, maybe we shouldn’t delve into too much detail. What about offering us a concise version of it? Same way I described it?”

“She had no idea I was actually there. But she needed me. God, she was so. Fucking. Needy.” My fingers curl around my knees, and I lean forward. Shiloh shifts uncomfortably in her seat. I’d give anything to shove her legs apart and see for myself how wet she is. “She couldn’t stop moaning while she spread her lips for the razor. Then she shaved some more. Moaned harder. She was dripping, Miss Talbot.”

Her heart thunders. I hear it in the silent room. I’m dying to close my fist around it. Own her in every possible way.

“H-how could you tell?”

“I saw it on her thighs.” Images flash before me. That first time I gave Shiloh pleasure. My fingers curled inside her pussy. Her arousal soaked my wrist. Fuck, the orgasm she fought to hold at bay. “Even from my place under her bed. I’d never wanted anything more than to pin her to the wall and devour every drop. Straight from the source.”

She loses her grip on the legal pad and pen. They fall with a clatter on the floor. “Sorry. So sorry.”

“When she was done, she cleaned herself, climbed on the bed, and moaned again. The mattress groaned while she fucked her hand.” As Shiloh bends to pick her stuff up, I don’t stop torturing her. I lay it on thick. Seducing her. Moaning for her. Making a mess out of her. In public. “That was my cue.”

“Maybe we should respect her privacy? Stop here?”

“Why?” I shrug one shoulder. Cock my head to the side. “I didn’t. I didn’t care that she wasn’t actually waiting for me. Or calling me.”

Shiloh gasps, the sound incredibly sweet. Because she knows this one thing.

I was always coming for her. I was coming for what’s mine, no matter what.

“Yes, Miss Talbot. I lied to you when I said it was consensual. That she was waiting. No. She was just shaving her pussy. But she was mine nonetheless.” I rub my cock over my jeans. Once. Shiloh presses her lips together, silencing a moan or another gasp. “I told her so when I slid out from under the bed. When I wrapped a hand around her throat. When I had the other over her mouth.”

“That sounds illegal.” Illegal, yes, but Shiloh’s clenching her thighs. Her blush creeps up her cheeks.

So much blood is coursing through her body.

It reminds me that the cuts on her ass and thighs have partly healed. That I have more untouched flesh to play with. I want that so much it hurts.

I’m desperate to pounce on her.

But I’m not done. This is our last chance to play this game.

Before I use the surprises I have in my hoodie pocket on Shiloh. Before we head home for good.

I have this. *We* have this.

“Nothing illegal about taking what’s yours. Besides, she needed me. One moment, she screamed into my palm, and the other, when I rolled her nipple between my fingers and tugged, she was back to moaning. She cried and dry-humped me. Couldn’t help herself. She cried harder when I forced her to the bed. When I slapped her pussy.”

“Enough,” Shiloh breathes the command, her voice choked. The sweet scent of her cunt filters into my mask, and *fuck*. “Jakob. Mr. White. The session is over. We’re done. Out.”

She’s right. The session is over.

Now I’m fucking done.

Without another word, I get up and leave, knowing she’ll follow.

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27

KALEB

Rain has been pouring outside since just after we entered the school's clinic. Now it pelts against the windows. Harsh and unforgiving.

The sound of Shiloh's heels behind me is louder.

A sharp, harsh clicking in the empty hallway.

She should've left the room through the other door. Should've joined her peers before following me.

She didn't.

Fortunately, no one cares about her. No one followed us out here.

Maybe they're curious about me, and Eddy is holding them back.

Who cares?

We're alone.

The glass door leading out of the building withstands the rain. The howling wind. The darkness.

I could head outside. Go home. Do what's right by Shiloh.

Fuck her senseless there, alone. Risk-free.

She'd be calmer for it.

Happier.

Less satisfied.

As will I.

The sign to the bathroom is to my left. I don't think twice before going inside.

I check under the stalls.

Empty.

I stand here waiting for her, my arms folded across my chest.

The seconds it takes her to barge into the bathroom are the longest of my life.

My cock throbs. Hurts. All my blood has gone down there, fueled by the filthy scenario I planted in Shiloh's head. By our role play.

"You." The door shuts behind her.

She slams it, and I pounce on her. Fast.

My large body forces her backward. As her back hits the wall, she lets out a terrified, sweet gasp. Eyes fixed on my mask, wide and a little manic. Panicked and wanting. The light blue skies in them transform, darkening.

She's still somewhat startled, and I use it to my advantage.

One hand curls around her delicate throat.

Defeat flashes in her eyes. "You just can't let me win, can you?"

"It was never about winning." My other hand goes to my hoodie pocket where the white face paint tube I bought rests. "It was about fighting, and you've done so well."

I flick the cap open.

The noise grabs her attention. "What's that?"

Again, I could do the right thing here. I could turn this into a harmless sex game instead of torture.

Where's the fun in that?

I've already come to terms with the fact that I can't kill her for the heck of it. That as soon as she's dead, it's game over. I'll be devastated. I'll jump right into hell after her.

Torturing her, though?

She'll live.

Then she'll crawl to me day and night, begging for more.

I tilt my head. Take a closer look closer at her.

Hmm. That fire inside her. Those gritted teeth.

I've managed to rile her up.

The thought that I might've brought something worse than a needle must be making it worse for her. Her fear, it's stronger than the defeat she felt just now.

"You're in a fighting mood." Painting her will have to wait. I have to touch her, and I do. I leave the paint tube in my pocket, sliding my hand under her skirt. Cupping her pussy over her silk panties. "What a turn-on, to see how much you want this. You're soaked." I stroke her over her panties

and she presses herself against me. So desperate. “This need is driving you insane. You’re just as fucked up as I am, little sister.”

“It’s not fair.” Her growl has my dick jumping. I’m leaking for her. “I’ll never win with you.”

She will. She already has.

I’ll tell her later.

“Newsflash.”

She moans when I hook my fingers underneath the waistband of her panties. When my knuckles brush her hot, wet skin.

I bring my mask close to her face. “Life’s not fair.”

The glare she pins me with when I tear them off her body.

Delicious.

“But—”

I pocket her underwear. “But nothing.”

She struggles against me as I turn her to face the wall. Writhes and squirms.

It gets her nowhere.

And it makes me really, painfully hard. The need to pound into her is a drum that beats relentlessly inside my head.

“Kaleb.” She pushes against the wall, trying to break free.

“You’re adorable,” I whisper in her ear, gripping her hips. “And strong. There’s nothing weak about you. This, what we’re doing, is about something else entirely.”

With my dick pressed to her back, she’s locked beneath me. Hot beneath me. I shift her hair to the side. Lift my mask so I can taste her. Taking a bite is fucking tempting when she tastes so good. But that’s all I do, taste her, trailing my lips down her delicate neck. Her sweet scent is intoxicating.

Biting her over her blazer that she put back on before leaving the clinic, that’s right over the spot where her dad scarred her…

Heaven.

“What is it about then?”

“Us.”

I pull back, twist my hand in the collar of her blazer, and rip a piece of fabric off.

“It’s about the countless nights we spent apart.” I put my mask back into place.

She’s stopped fighting, letting me whirl her back to me.

“About having your name drilled into my head. So goddamn deep, Shiloh, that some days I thought I was losing my mind.” My hand finds its way back to her neck. Choking her is hot. It’s everything. “All I could ever think of was you. Shiloh, Shiloh, Shiloh. I could never get you out of my head. But that’s okay. I’m here to make sure you’ll never be able to get rid of me.”

Her lips part to say something.

I’ll hear her out later.

When the pressure in my temples lessens.

When I’m feeling less vile. Depraved. Driven to express my love through pain.

Later.

The piece of black cloth, what used to be the collar of her blazer, fits perfectly into her mouth. I shove the gag deeper, my body buzzing at the sight of the black fabric stuffed between her lips.

“Mmm!”

I dip my chin, ordering her to be quiet. No, she can’t see my face. My expression.

She senses it.

“Good girl.” I seethe. “Don’t you dare spit it out.”

Her eyes glaze over. No, she doesn’t hate it. She’s aroused, her legs spreading for me. When her knees buckle, I catch her by her throat, holding her upright.

“You’re such a slut for this.” The paint bottle is cold in my hand again, warming as I lift it between us. “For being my plaything. My broken toy. You’ve been hurt by all the wrong people. All this time, they fucked with what’s mine.”

She trembles the higher I lift the paint tube.

Her fear is a drug. Her saliva soaking the makeshift gag is just as hot.

In a way, I wish she’d never feel safe around me.

“Those days are over.” I tip her face up, my thumb pushing from under her chin. “I’m taking you. You’ll never be anyone else’s but mine.”

She blinks. Submissive and gorgeous.

And I’m being a bastard, not telling her to close her eyes.

I’m being me.

Without a warning, I squeeze the tube right above her forehead. Shiloh winces as the first cold squirt lands on her. Whimpers into her gag. Stays in

place. With my cock grinding against her stomach.

“I could’ve brought another mask for you.” More white paint seeps over her temples and her cheeks. Her horrified look that’s soaked with lust has every muscle in my body straining for her. “But you were so prim and motherfucking proper this morning. Going to the police station. Having that army of stuck-up lawyers trailing behind you. I loved it. I wanted to ruin it.”

She growls by the time I splash the paint over her cheeks. Dangerously close to her eyes, which she affixes on me. I thrust my hips into her.

My heart is about to jump out of my chest and straight between Shiloh’s rib cage.

I listen closely to any noise coming from outside. Nothing. The hall is silent. The rain wails, but there are no footsteps outside the door.

“Plus, a mask wouldn’t have worked for me. I have plans for your mouth.”

When I’m done squirting paint on her face, I hurl the tube to the floor. I delve two fingers into her cheek, smearing it on her. I’m aggressive, applying pressure on her face. Every touch, every paint-covered patch of skin, makes me want to bury myself inside her.

It makes her pant louder for me.

I look at her face, at the white paint covering it. At the torn fabric filling her mouth.

She’s beautiful like this.

Wrecked.

“I hope you’re ready for something bigger than the gag.”

Her muffled moan speaks to the animal in me. I fucking growl for her.

“Such a dirty slut.” I slide my fingers up to her eyes, closing them. She shrieks into the cloth, rocking her hips into me. “Such a pretty, fucked-up girl. Such a pure one. Life has hurt you, but you haven’t given up on us. You’ve waited for me to destroy you. Hoped I’d break you and put you back together. Beautiful, Shi. So beautiful.”

“Hmm.” She bobs her head as much as I allow. The movement causes my hand to slide into her hair.

“Good girl.” The roots of her hair are now painted, too. Ruined. Demolished. Gorgeous.

I’m baptizing her into the fucked-up religion that is my life.

Her new reality.

“There’s more. I’m not finished with your mask.” The second tube I bought is out of my pocket. I pop the cap with my thumb, squirting black paint on both her closed eyes. Throwing it to who-the-fuck-cares once I’m finished.

“Needy whore. Begging for cock.” I drag my fingers over her eyes, painting a black X shape on each of them. “My whore. Let me look at you. Open your eyes.”

She flutters them open. Stares at me.

Her blue eyes are dazed. Wanting. Desire bleeds from them.

I’m suffocated by it. My dick aches for it.

I have to touch her in order to wipe the remaining paint on her clothes. I need my fingers clean so I can do—yes, *fuck*—this. Shoving my fingers in her cunt is all I’ve ever wanted.

She’s dripping on me, clenching, riding my hand. Moaning when I curl my fingers inside her.

A flick of my thumb on her swollen clit, and Shiloh gives in to me. Her orgasm reverberates through her body. Wrecks it. She’s shivering hard, nostrils flaring. She needs air faster than she can get it.

And I smile.

Every night I spent at Berkshire. Every session where shrinks tried to pick my brain apart. Every disgusted look someone aimed at me. Every time Dick stole my things.

Every time I had to jerk off into the drain instead of filling her with cum.

Worth. It.

“On your knees.” I’m not asking. I’m demanding, shoving her to the floor by her shoulder.

Her knees hit the tiles, and *yes*. I ruined another part of my princess. Her expensive clothes are torn and in disarray. Her face is a mess. Hair disheveled from being pushed against the wall.

“Poor little rich girl. Poor little princess. That role never suited you.” I tilt my head, ripping the gag out of her mouth. “Has it?”

“Never asked for it,” she growls.

I have one hand in her hair, silky and smooth, and mine. The other hand is on the button of my jeans.

I pause. “Take me out. Put those lips around my cock. Paint it fucking white.”

“Yes.” She isn’t defeated or sad anymore. She’s eager, pushing my jeans and boxers down.

Her small hand is hot around my length, and I can’t help it. I thrust into her. Slam one hand on the wall and rock my hips into her fist.

She’s taking what only I could give her.

Happiness. True happiness. The kind that her heart desires, not some bullshit that society told her she should feel.

One that can’t be bought. That can’t be forced onto someone.

She knows I’ll always give it to her.

She can see it coming, the pain and torment I’m about to inflict on her.

“Stop fucking around.” I grab the base of my dick, aiming it at her lips. A bead of precum has trickled onto the barbell. I tug on her hair, pressing her mouth to it. “Lick it.”

Her pink tongue peeks out, flicking and swirling on my piercing. The contact, the fucking contact, has electricity shooting up to my head.

A low string of curses bursts past my lips. I call her names. I praise her. I tell her what a good whore she is for humming on my cock.

I slap those plump lips with the tip, smearing pre-cum on them. Degrading her in a way that turns her on. That has her angling toward me.

She swipes her tongue slowly on me. I can’t—can’t take it a second longer. I push her head forward at the same time I jerk my hips up.

“That’s it.” She’s coughing, sputtering around me. Saliva trickles out of the corners of her mouth, splotching the white paint on her face. Leaving white streaks on my cock. “Take it like the good girl you are. Suck me. Baby. Fuck. You break down so pretty for me. You—*Jesus*—you’re a beautiful mess. Mine. *Mine*.”

She flattens her tongue, sending a jolt of electricity through me. I groan at how good it feels until she hollows her cheeks and sucks. Lets me hold her there while I fuck her throat, while she gags every time my pierced tip hits that spot in the back of her throat.

Every. Fucking. Time.

I could come in her mouth. On her face. Empty myself on her pristine shirt.

Screw that.

Screw my mask too.

I rip it off my face, pull Shiloh off me, and haul her to her feet.

Our gazes clash. My breath gets knocked out of me.

“Fuck.” I’m about to spin her. Bend her over and rut into her cunt.

When sounds filter into the bathroom.

There are people in the hall.

Their voices come from a distance. One of them is Eddy.

A quick glance reveals that there’s no lock on the door.

No one gets to see my Shiloh like this.

Back there, we were just flirting. She teased me. I detailed my explicit, kinky fantasy.

That was that.

That’s the last time anyone will ever hear her talking about sex.

“Kaleb.” Her voice is a pleading one. “We can continue this at home. Let’s go.”

“Fuck no.” I drag her into one of the stalls fast, kicking my mask, paint tubes, and her ripped collar over there as I go. “Also. Just for entertaining the idea of walking out of here without getting this pretty pussy pounded, you can expect a punishment, Shi.”

Her lips pinch. Blue eyes narrowing. Pleading. “They might come in.”

“They will.” I lock the stall door. “Nothing’s going to stop me from fucking you.”

The need to claim her is a clawing, ruthless, incessant pain. My chest hurts with it. My head can’t think of anything else but spinning her and bending her over.

There’s no fighting it.

One swift movement and her cheek slams into the door. She has one eye looking at me. Her pupil grows impossibly large. It pushes out the blue in her iris, looking as black as my soul.

“Please.” She’s shivering. Closing her legs. Thinking she can escape me.

Not happening. I bend over, grab her panties and bind her wrists together.

“I don’t know why”—I press my hand to her face, rubbing my thumb along her painted lips while scrunching her skirt up to her waist—“I have to keep repeating myself.”

“What?” Her hot breath tickles my finger.

The voices outside are getting louder. Closer.

I’d love to stretch out our time together. No place has ever felt more right, more *home*, than her pussy. Always tight for me. Always sucking me

in.

We'll have company soon.

"Whenever I want, no, *need*, to be inside you."

Her legs shake. That's how hard she's working on closing them. On denying me what's mine. My hand on her face holds her in place for me.

That's not enough, though. I dig my fingers into her hip, tilting her ass up. Spreading her.

She still has enough sense to try to wriggle out of my grip.

I release her hip. A temporary relief.

"When I demand it, little sister, you'll let me." *Slap*, right there, punishing her dripping pussy.

She lets out a groan, a strangled, agonized one.

I slap her three more times before she lets go.

"Kaleb." Her muscles aren't as strained. She isn't as adamant about pushing me away.

"For the rest of your life." Needing this one for myself, I slap her cunt. "You'll be powerless. At my mercy."

Three last slaps to her pussy and she's putty in my hands. I pull back to admire her body. Her bruised ass and thighs are bearing my marks, hot and angry.

Accusing.

She isn't. My stepsister is horny and boneless. Mine.

My Shiloh is a freak. Both of us are.

My depraved woman moans when I push my thumbs into one of her wounds. She took the bandages off, and I'm not mad about it. Not when I can touch her like this.

She presses herself toward me, getting hotter and hotter the more she bleeds for me.

"You will always be a good slut for me." Enough of her fresh, mesmerizing cuts. I swallow a groan, kicking her legs wider. She's spread open, trembling. Her gaze has turned from defiant to pleading. I tease her, grazing the pierced head of my cock on her clit. "You'll let me fuck you anywhere, any fucking time."

Her first "Please" barely leaves her lips, and I'm shoved all the way inside her pussy. She's squeezing me, tight and hot and soaking.

I'll forever be mesmerized by her. It'll never change, I realize as I rut into her. Ever. I'll forever be hers.

Violating her is the worst sin I've ever committed. Taking this pure thing and turning her into this. Into a filthy girl who gets off on being railed in a public bathroom.

Showing her just what a slut for pain she is.

I'd do it all over again. I'd go to hell and back for her. So she'd have everything.

She's clenching around me. I already know it's her tell, that it's what happens to her body right before she climaxes.

"Say my name." They're right outside now. I hear their feet stopping. Their voices reach us. I hear the judgment in their tone. They'll pay for it. One problem at a time. "Say my name when you come all over my cock, Shi. I need it. Need it so bad. Make me feel good, baby."

"Kaleb." A whisper. I go harder, dragging my cock out and forcing it back in. Her eyebrows knit. Her bottom lip trembles. "Kaleb. Kaleb. Fuck. I'm going to—I'm coming."

"Good girl." I grab her hips, giving her all of me. Taking everything she has to offer and then some. The agony. Her orgasm. Her life. "That's a good fucking girl. I'm coming. Going to breed you. Fuck babies into you. You'll be my filthy girl. You'll have your belly swollen with our children, but it won't stop me. Fuck no. I'll have your sweet pussy every day. Fuck. Every goddamn day."

That's it. Can't stand another second of holding my orgasm in. I empty myself inside while she's still milking me, groaning her name over and over until there's nothing left.

The door creaks open when I'm done.

Shiloh's eyes are panicked.

Mine aren't.

Yeah, these pricks heard me groan her name when I came.

They judged her for that, too.

It's the last time they'll be judging anyone, ever. I'll make sure of that.

After I take care of her.

Shiloh.

The binding around her wrists must burn. I undo the knot and rub the skin that endured so much, so beautifully for me.

I overhear the bitch outside while the temperature in my body reaches an all-time high.

“Slut. I knew there was a reason why Professor Dempsey chose her to join us. God, Eddy, I hope you kick her skanky ass out. For good.”

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28

SHILOH

This is how I die. On campus grounds. In a bathroom stall.

With my stepbrother's cum dripping down my thighs. My orgasm soaking his dick. My cheek pressed to the door.

My days as a student here are over. There's no reputation to uphold. No future to give a fuck about.

Being called a slut by someone I won't remember by next week shouldn't hurt. Shouldn't embarrass me.

Her comment stings, anyway.

Shame burns my throat. I'm confused. Don't know what to do with myself. Where do I go from here? Will they leave? Let me have my walk of shame in peace?

I don't think so.

I feel too much. I'm too weak to handle this.

I'm looking at Kaleb for answers while he releases, then rubs my wrists. Without a word, he shows me that he has all the solutions. He smooths down my skirt. Tucks himself in.

The girl outside rambles on and on. Reveling in her righteous monologue.

I hardly hear her. Hard to focus on anything as I'm being pulled into Kaleb's embrace. He cups the back of my head. Wraps his arm around my waist.

His confidence is intoxicating. I inhale it, feeding on it like a vampire.

For a long minute, he’s just there. Being warm and reassuring. Lending me his strength.

“N-no need for name calling.” In my dazed, mortified state, I faintly recognize Eddy’s voice.

The air in the stall shifts. Kaleb’s done coddling me. The warmth vanishes. A chill sweeps over my bones.

His shadow does that to me. His presence.

It’s pure evil. But he doesn’t aim any of it at me.

His entire focus, his fiery wrath, is directed at the stall’s door. At the people on the other side of it.

I’m staring up at him. At this menace. At the danger in his eyes. The vengeance.

Standing at his full, intimidating height, he returns my gaze.

His golden eyes look downright murderous. His jaw clenches.

For a person who hardly feels anything, catching that much emotion in his expression is terrifying.

I’m ready, my body language tells him.

He answers by squeezing my shoulder. Once.

“We just came here t-to use the bathroom before we leave,” Eddy’s stuttering.

“Stop being self-righteous,” the woman groans. “*She* isn’t here to pee, is she? She’s here to get a dick. Any dick, it seems like.”

Kaleb bends to the floor, picking up his mask.

“Let’s go home.” Eddy has a sense of responsibility for his students. Unfortunately for him, it won’t be enough to save anyone here.

Kaleb rises, slipping the mask over his head. His eyes are nothing but black holes, but I see through them.

The message they send is crystal clear.

No one’s allowed to talk to me like that. No one will ever survive saying these things about me. No one will ever look down on me.

His princess.

That awareness is the shot of adrenaline I’ve been craving. The final slap on the face to shake me out of my daze.

It obliterates the shame.

Silently, we communicate like only the two of us can.

Like stepsiblings. Like soulmates.

We’re together in this.

Always.

“Oh, please.” Hinges squeak as someone opens one of the stall’s doors. The woman, judging by how close she sounds. “Don’t tell me you’ve fallen for that easy pussy”—she’s louder, doubling down on the obnoxious tone —“too.”

Kaleb brings his hands to my painted cheeks. At her vicious words, he squeezes my face. His passion, love, and depravity are just as strong as mine.

I blink. Once. *I’m okay. I’m ready.*

Gloves. He takes them out of his hoodie pocket, pulling them over my hands first, then his.

One swift movement and I’m shoved behind him.

“Please mind your l-language. Miss Talbot is—” Whatever Eddy was about to say dies on his lips.

Kaleb bursts out of our stall, and the door bangs against the wall. Two people shriek at the sound. At his ominous presence.

I peek my head around him in time to see it’s Eddy and the girl.

There’s a third man out there, one of the two I saw earlier today.

A silent man. Blond hair. Blue eyes. Blue slacks and a black peacoat.

My black peacoat that I left in the clinic.

Kaleb would recognize the coat in a heartbeat.

He’ll kill the man with a death wish for it. Soon, I bet.

The thieving fucker watches the scene unfold, unbothered. Doesn’t make an escape attempt.

He smiles while my masked stepbrother approaches the woman, his hand curled before he gets to her.

And he does. Kaleb grabs her by the throat, holding her up in the air as if she weighs nothing.

Eddy is frozen in place. His eyes are gaping, jaw dropped.

He can’t move, though I bet he wishes he could.

The other man’s gaze turns curious, registering the woman’s shrieks of misery. “Put me down. Put me down.”

He’s staying out of sheer, morbid curiosity.

Huge, fatal mistake. One he’ll pay for.

I slip out of the stall as Kaleb enters the adjacent stool. I don’t want him there alone with her. He’s mine.

“What are you doing?” she rasps, struggling to suck in a breath.

Kaleb shakes her in response.

Apparently, the sudden movement is the wake-up call Eddy's been desperate for.

Poor loser tries so hard to go unnoticed. His steps are small as he backs up toward the door, his trembling hand reaching for the handle.

Delusional.

I won't let him out. Won't give him a chance to change his mind and rat Kaleb out.

They'll. Take. Him. From. Me.

This is the end of the road for Eddy.

Choking sounds of the woman come from my left as I launch at him. Power surges through my veins. I don't feel like a person anymore. I feel like a human weapon. A deadly one.

In my periphery, while I launch myself at Eddy, I notice the woman whom Kaleb's choking is flailing her feet in the air.

The blond guy's eyes flick between Kaleb and me, and he huffs a laugh.

He shows no sign of remorse for stealing my coat. For enjoying this *show*.

"Please, please, please." Her demands have shifted into pleading. "I'll pay you. Anything you want."

Kaleb thrusts her against the stall. I hear it rather than see it, the loud *thump* that rattles the room. Her pathetic cries.

But focusing on her is a privilege I don't have at the moment.

Eddy is about to open the door.

He sees me coming, shrinking into the wall.

"Please." His fingers search blindly, frantically, for the handle that's slipped from his grasp. "I told her to stop. She wouldn't listen."

Problem is, one of these days, someone *will* listen to him. When he tells them our story.

Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow.

In a year, three, ten? He'll forget how terrified he is at this moment. The senseless mumbling of the woman in Kaleb's hold will be a distant memory. My stepbrother's unleashed wrath won't be as vivid in Eddy's mind.

He could write a book about us. Turn us into a spectacle. People will hunt us like animals.

"Please."

Following Kaleb's lead, I lock my hand around Eddy's throat. The adrenaline rush has injected strength into me, and I shove him against the wall, putting my face in his.

Inside his gray eyes, I see myself.

Black Xs are painted over my eyelids. White paint covers most of my face, except for the smudges from Kaleb's thumb on my cheeks and the area around my mouth.

My lips twist in a snarl.

Eddy starts crying.

Too bad my compassion only extends to one person and one person alone.

My Kaleb.

Feeling feral as all fuck, I turn my head to watch him in his element.

As if he's been waiting for me, Kaleb looks my way.

His silence is deadly.

Boom.

Thrusting her up against the wall a second time, his black eyes are still fixed on mine.

He cocks his head to the side. *Got something to say?*

"You're so hot when you're like this, brother."

Let the people here hear me.

None of them are getting out of here alive.

He makes a sound in the back of his throat, pulling the woman off the wall.

He's fierce, my Kaleb. Big and goddamn mighty. He could end this in a heartbeat, squeeze the life out of her, and be done with it.

Thing is, he was born with sick needs. Sick needs that need tending to.

And one of them is torturing people.

The other is satisfying me. Of course.

Now he gets to do both.

Kaleb carries his victim toward the hook on the wall.

"Oh God." Eddy's fingers are on my wrist, helplessly trying to push me off him. He thrashes his body to no avail. I lean my weight on him. It's not a lot, but I manage to overpower him. I do have my crazy on my side. "Sweet Jesus."

While Eddy is held firmly in place, my eyes dart to the third threat. The man that isn't restrained by either me or Kaleb.

He’s staying very still, seeming as entranced and as captivated as he was before.

If he’s planning to write a book about us himself, he better think again.

Leech. Fucking leeches, every last one of them.

Later, I repeat to myself, quickly returning my attention to Kaleb and the woman.

The veins in her eyes have exploded, red drowning out the white. Her nostrils flare, sucking in air. As much as Kaleb allows, anyway.

God, he’s gorgeous. The corded veins in his hand. His devotion to killing the woman who said awful things about me.

When I was young, I was conflicted about this side of him. His revenge on the boys who molested me was gory. Bloody. He left their hearts scattered on the bathroom floor, Dad said. Their rib cages had been cracked open.

I understood why Kaleb did it. It terrified me nonetheless.

Eleven years later, the fear is gone. Wiped away.

Love bursts from my body. Adoration.

Gratefulness.

“Crew.” Her strangled plea is followed by a hand gesture. She outstretches it toward the man who does nothing to help her. The blond observer. “Crew.”

Nothing. He wouldn’t have been able to help her if he tried.

Which he doesn’t.

One second, she’s alive. Breathing, sort of. Awake for this nightmare.

Boom.

Kaleb doesn’t just push her up against the wall. He hangs her onto the hook.

It’s sinfully hot. His viciousness. His creativity.

“*Hakkk*.” Blood spurts out of her mouth, painting her lips and chin red. “*Hakkk*.”

Kaleb releases her throat, leaving her there. His hand lifts to the side of her head. Resting it on her temple.

“*Hakkk*.” But it’s weaker now. It’s the last sound she makes before Kaleb shoves her head violently to the side and breaks her neck.

The cracking sound has every part of my body throbbing for him.

Another sound comes just then. Eddy’s growling loudly, pushing against me.

I’m so fucking done with him.

Kaleb moves toward Crew, his head turned toward me. I shake my head once. *Don’t need help.*

I really don’t. Making a V shape with the fingers of my free hand, I twist back to Eddy.

His eyebrows are pulled down, his entire body working to free himself from me.

How. About. No.

I shove my middle and index finger into his eyes. Pushing them as far as they’d go. The squelching sounds and blood seeping down his cheeks don’t bother me. I’m proud of myself for finally doing something significant to help Kaleb, other than handling the police detectives.

I’ve been standing on the sidelines for too long. Have allowed others to dictate what I can or cannot do for him.

Those days are over. Gone.

I hook my fingers inside Eddy’s eye sockets, flipping my wrist.

Something tears inside of him as he screams. Another wave of blood gushes out.

He’s grown quiet. Death has taken him.

“At last, we’re alone,” Crew says, his voice hoarse.

I pull my fingers out of Eddy, stepping back and letting his lifeless body drop to the floor. Then I twist to the idiot who’s actually happy to be here, the one Kaleb holds up by his throat.

“Excuse me?” I ask. Kaleb’s warmth washes over me as I come to stand closer to him. He leans into me, the latex of his mask pressing to the top of my head.

It’s the sweetest kiss.

“Y-your dad paid me to stay away.” Crew’s eyes bulge. His lips turn a darker shade of blue. “I run an indie news blog. You might’ve heard of me—Hyatt Holiday. I dug up information about you, and your dad gave me a shit ton of money to take it all down. To stop stalking you. We can work around the deal I made with him. If you give me your permission, it doesn’t count as stalking, does it?”

As much as I hate to admit it, I need him alive for a few more seconds.

He holds information that we’re missing. About my father. Maybe about an accomplice, someone who’s waiting for him on the outside.

Kaleb and I have to know what we're up against. We have to cover all our bases after we kill the building's security and destroy the tapes. Yeah, it's unfortunate that the guard will have to lose his life.

What other choice do we have?

None.

Kaleb tenses when I place my hand on his shoulder. Relaxes when I remove my glove, shove it in my bra, and stroke his arm. He looks at me through his mask, asking for my take on this.

"Let the man talk." *Then we can kill him.* "I'll never turn down a good deal."

A grunt. Then he lets go of Crew's throat, not letting go, not really. Kaleb threads his fingers through Crew's hair and tugs.

"Okay, okay. Cool. I get it. I won't waste your time." Crew slants his blue eyes at me. They're no longer bulging. For a little while. "Thank you."

Kaleb shakes Crew's head. Violently.

"Right. Don't piss off the obsessed stepbrother." The psycho grins up at Kaleb, the smile splitting his face in half. "So. I couldn't fucking believe my eyes when it was the two of you, when you walked into the clinic today. Like, how lucky could one person get?"

We could be here all night, listening to him drooling over us. His excitement pours from him, smelling worse than the blood and death surrounding us.

Not interested.

"You're after an interview?" I veer the conversation to where I want it to go.

"Yes. Yes. I'd pay for it. Your father wired 50K into my account. You can have every cent."

Apparently, my dad has been busy talking to everyone else except me.

Kaleb told me that my dad had called on that first night he visited me. That he'd deleted the call. It hadn't changed a thing between us.

A real, loving father wouldn't have been deterred by it. A man who cared about his daughter would've kept calling. He would have shown up at her apartment.

Instead, my father changed his number. Hired a man to stalk me. Sent Kaleb's psychiatrist over to my place. All in the name of having the upper hand over us. A reason to finally get rid of me. Something to justify it.

“No cameras. No editor or PA?” I ask, fishing for information. “Only you.”

“Correct.” He chuckles, smiling. The idiot. “I’m a one-man show. It’ll be just the two of you and me. Oh, and the smell of the money advertisers will throw my way after this.”

Good. When we burn down his office later, no one will be there to protect the materials he’s dug up on us.

“You can’t tell anyone we’re here, either. My father included. I want him to think we tried to escape.” I cross my arms over my chest. “These are our terms. Take it or leave it.”

“Sure, sure.” He inches closer, and Kaleb yanks him right back. “Your father threatened to kill me if I went public or blackmailed him for more money.” A nervous laugh. “I haven’t said a word to anyone about this, about you two. Your secret will stay safe with me in exchange for this exclusive.”

“Great,” is what I’m saying. What I actually mean is, *Finish him, Kaleb.*

Crew is clueless. His grin widens.

A moment later, that grin disappears into the wall.

Kaleb is so fucking sexy, so fucking hot when he bashes Crew’s face in.

“Why”—*bam*—“stop”—*crunch*—“please”—*smash, smash, smash*—“ow.”

Blood splashes on the wall. Brain matter drips down Crew’s temple.

My stepbrother doesn’t relent.

Why should he?

He’s having fun.

Crunching and smashing sounds echo inside the small bathroom at a steady pace. As loud and insistent as the beats of my heart.

Eventually, Mr. Sleuth stops fighting. Releases his final breath.

My cheeks are hot, heart fluttering.

I want Kaleb. I need him inside me. No man, woman, or porn video could ever compare to this.

This raw savageness. My unapologetic murderer. My own personal vigilante.

The best thing to have ever happened to me.

I’m breathing hard, as turned on as I’ve ever been, as I watch him lean over to grab Crew’s phone and take the laptop out of his bag.

My nipples are pulled tight at the sight of him smashing them beneath his foot, turning them into nothing.

“Security office, then home?” I’m heady with desire, batting my eyelashes at him.

“Sounds like a plan, little sister.” He opens the door for me, his other gloved hand skimming my cheek. “I hope you know I’m nowhere near done with you tonight.”

I reach for the bulge in his jeans, biting my bottom lip at how hard he is. How he jerks in my hand. “Please, don’t ever be done with me. Ever.”

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SHILOH

"You did so well."

My heart soars at Kaleb's praise.

I'm bathing in it. In his attention. His heat.

In his touch.

After he forced himself into me in my sleep. After he made me come while I was still blinking away my dreams.

It's wrong to let him treat me the way he does. Fucking me in my sleep isn't right.

He hasn't waited for me to wake up before violating me, and now, after he's fucked me, I want more of him.

I spread my legs wider for him. I bite my bottom lip, then I bite him.

My pussy begs for his cum, for his babies, and he lets me have it. Kaleb shoves it deeper inside of me, and holy wow. My skin has never tingled like this. I'm floating.

Contentment shines through his golden eyes. Desire, too.

"Hmm." That sound of satisfaction slips past my lips. My smile curves my mouth up.

Depravity at its finest.

It's all I have.

It's all I want. To be here, in his apartment, well rested. Well fucked. While we're living our best lives as if nothing happened last night. As if we didn't kill four people.

The last part sucked. Murdering the security man. He was innocent. His only sin was showing up for work that day.

He was also a witness.

While there were no cameras inside the bathroom, he'd seen my face—not Kaleb's, who'd been hidden behind the mask. He watched me walk in, then walk out.

We could've hacked the cameras somehow, sure. Sadly, we couldn't erase his memory.

His death was unfortunate and inevitable. We were quick about it. One blow to the head and he was gone.

The sharp bite of Kaleb's teeth digging into my leg jolts me out of my daydreaming.

I shriek. He places both hands on my thighs, brows furrowed. "You left me just now. Went somewhere inside your head. Without me."

"I would never." Even when deep in thought, Kaleb is always there. Forever.

His hair is soft beneath my fingertips. He's silent during the long minute it takes him to believe me.

"Okay." A soft kiss on where he bit me sends shivers through me. "I'm going to try something. See if I can make you come again. I want to—have to—know what makes you feel good."

"You literally just—"

My breath catches in my throat when three of his fingers are shoved into my pussy. His teeth are on my clit, grazing it. Then biting.

"Oh God." I'm done stroking his hair. I'm pulling on it with every bit of dark desire that he's making me feel. My sanity, he sucks on my clit and steals it from me altogether. Toes curling, my heels dig into the bed. "Kaleb, fuck."

Rain pours outside the apartment. Thunder cracks somewhere in the distance. The glass rattles as the wind howls louder. The heater doesn't work.

I couldn't care less.

The whole world is painted a dull shade of gray. Boring. Mundane. Replaceable.

Everything but him.

Everything but his intense attention on my pussy. Nothing but his mouth on me. His tongue swiping, then his teeth again, and—fuck, fuck, fuck.

The look he’s spearing me with. My God.

He is my God.

A sliver of emotion pushes through his golden eyes. Something other than desire, jealousy, or pure murderous rage. Other than his blank stare that I obsess over.

Curiosity.

“So good.” I choke on the words, moaning them. He needs to hear my encouragement. I’ll give it to him. I’ll give him everything. “You—yes. Just like that. You’re not trying to make it good for me, Kaleb. Christ, you *know*. So good. You make me feel *so* good.”

Kaleb was right that first time when we lost our virginity together.

I didn’t need to fuck anyone else to know how to fuck you.

He hums against my damp, sensitive skin, and it’s so much.

This pleasure is like reaching the mountain peak, only to realize it’s not it. That there’s more to climb, more to explore, and oh, holy fuck.

Black dots line the edges of my vision. My breath comes in heavy pants as he pushes his thumb inside my soaking pussy too. Soaking it in my arousal before pushing it to my tighter hole.

Despite my fierce grip on his hair, he raises his lips. “How does that feel?”

“So. Good. Yes. Yes. Please.” My hips thrust into him, fucking his face. Can’t stop. Impossible. “I’m dying, Kaleb. I’m going to die without you. Please. I need you.”

“Love it when you beg.” His fingers curl inside me. More pleasure, I don’t know if I can take it.

“Oh God.”

“I’m your God.” He shoves his thumb deeper. I’m so full. So close. “Beg for me.”

“You’re my God,” I breathe out, and that’s all the encouragement he needs to go back to eating me out.

Never have I been tended to so thoroughly. Cared for this passionately. Being touched like I’m some kind of deity.

Because that’s what it is, isn’t it? His thumb shoved inside my ass, the rest of his body working to satisfy mine. This is worship. This is reverence.

And this—Oh, oh, *oh*. This orgasm is stronger than anything I’ve ever felt.

I have to slam a hand over my mouth to silence my screams.

No one’s coming for the Davis couple. Not yet, anyway.

No calls from their workplace, wherever that was. No neighbors knocking on our door. The couple who caught us slipping in here last night didn’t give us funny looks.

Thing is, the walls here are paper-thin.

“Such a good girl.” Naked Kaleb climbs up my body. His kiss is everything. It’s also terribly filthy to taste both him and me on his lips as he cradles my cheek in his palm.

I kiss him back like he’s my entire world.

He is.

We’re both breathing hard by the time he pulls back. He nuzzles his nose to mine, moving lower to trail his lips down my jaw.

He pauses at my neck. “Good girl.”

“Thank you.” I hug him, latching onto his warmth, where I stay for long, delicious minutes.

He lets me have it, brushing his scruff to my cheek.

Then, since he knows what I need better than I do, he gets up, throwing me over his shoulder. He does everything for me in the shower, loving me under the warm spray.

“My turn.” My tongue darts out, swiping along my bottom lip as I rake my gaze over his body.

Rivulets of water cascade down his lean muscles, highlighting the work of art that’s my stepbrother. His abs are defined, rippling. A light smattering of hair covers the V muscle that leads to his thick cock.

I squeeze soap into my palms, running my hands over the hard planes. Massaging soap into his strong arms. Trailing his veins with my fingertips.

His cock jerks. Thickens. He’s glowering at me.

Watching.

I’ll never get used to it. His attention is the equivalent of two hands burrowing inside my head, seeking information.

I’ll always be addicted to it. I’ll always question what it means.

Now, it means he wants to fuck me against the wall.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Eventually, the water runs cold and we get out. He dries me off, raking his fingers through my hair until it’s smooth and there are no more knots left.

When I shiver, he helps me into one of his black hoodies and his sweatpants, then pushes a pair of socks onto my feet.

From my place next to the dresser, I look at him as he shrugs on an identical hoodie and sweatpants.

No underwear for either of us. No need for them.

What for? We'll be inside all day. Maybe even tomorrow.

Maybe until we leave this city for good.

Our underwear will only get in the way.

With that thought, I reach for my phone. I hate that I have to check for missed calls and messages instead of spending every second staring at him. Being present, here, with him.

Sadly, neglecting it will look suspicious. I'll be called into questioning if I don't make this go away, so I check the damn thing.

At least no one knows where I am since I've turned off the location on my phone.

"You're frowning." Kaleb's there. I didn't notice him coming closer. He smooths out the frowning lines between my eyebrows. Watching me.

"It's these texts and emails that I have to get when all I want is to be with you." There's understanding in his eyes. This is the only way we can continue playing here in Seattle. Just for a bit longer. Just until it's time to kill our parents. "Can't have anyone coming for us."

"Speaking of." His lips brush my forehead, a fleeting moment, and then they're gone. He swipes the PI's phone, whose coordinates have also been turned off.

He's texting someone, probably Dad. Who hasn't contacted me.

No surprise there.

Other people are looking for me, though.

I answer Val's text.

I'm alive. No, I wasn't there when they murdered those people on campus. No, I can't talk right now. My throat is sore. I think I caught something. I won't be able to make it to Marina's wake. Sorry.

Then there's an email from Dad's assistant.

"Kaleb." My eyes narrow at my sneaky stepbrother. "Did you have anything to do with Dad asking me to meet him on Halloween? Did you know he would and that's why you chose that date?"

He brushes his knuckles along my cheek, sliding his hand into my hair.

Winds it and tugs. "Are you asking if I've been hiding shit from you?"

I pinch my lips, faking defiance. On the inside, I'm melting at his touch. "Have you?"

"No." He bends until his head is inches above mine. "I guess it's the universe's way of compensating us for the shit it put us through."

"Do you think they know?"

Kaleb's growl and harsher tug on my hair send out a clear message. He doesn't approve of my doubts. Hot. "Stop questioning me."

Through the searing pain in my scalp, I manage a smile. "Okay."

He releases me, but not before he pulls me into a crushing kiss.

Back to covering our tracks. I reply to Dad's assistant's email, agreeing to my father's request. I have no idea why he summoned me. It doesn't even matter.

My knight in shining…mask…will help me put him down once and for all.

His lawyers are next. When I didn't answer their calls, one of them texted. The detectives have questions after yesterday. I let them know I wasn't at the scene of the crime, didn't witness a damn thing. *I'm shocked*, I add for good measure, *and down with something*.

Last thing I say is that if the detectives insist on an interview, it'd have to wait.

They reply within seconds, assuring me they'll relay the message to the detectives. I have nothing to worry about.

The rest of the texts, calls, and emails aren't nearly as important.

Enough damage control. I throw the phone on the bed, returning to what truly matters.

Kaleb raises an eyebrow when he notices me ogling him as he folds the clothes that have just come out of the dryer. He'd been busy before he woke me up with his dick inside me, apparently.

My breaths are shallow the longer I watch him. He's delicious. Who would've thought folding clothes could look so sinful?

It is. On him, everything is.

He dips his chin. *See something you like?*

I lift a shoulder. *You.*

He closes the dresser drawer, guiding me to the kitchen, his hand on the small of my back.

"Breakfast," he huffs.

Would you look at us.

A man and a woman in love waking up together. Two people enjoying a lazy morning. Just us. Just Kaleb and Shiloh without the weight of the world on our shoulders.

We're painfully normal. I almost cry at that.

"Sit." One order and my ass drops to the nearest chair in the small dining area. He makes a low sound of approval and starts the coffee.

The coffeemaker stutters, but eventually works. Once it does, Kaleb turns to prepare breakfast. He sets out two plates, sliced bread, cheese, and butter. He pulls out a pan and puts it on the stove.

"Grilled cheese?" I ask, my elbows leaning on the table, my body arching toward him. I can't look anywhere else but at him, the only man in my world.

"Yeah." He looks over his shoulder, his lips curving up in a ghost of a smile. "I'd dreamed about it for years. About the ones you'd make me. During those weekends, your dad was stuck in the office and my mom was holed up in her room. Remember those?"

"I haven't forgotten a single thing about our time together."

"I liked those." A nod, and he's back to working on our food. Alone.

Like hell. He'll never be alone again. I won't stay seated when I can be closer. When I can touch him.

"They were nothing special." I bump my hip into his. "Anyone could've made those."

"No." He looks down at me, borderline murderous. I don't flinch, soaking up his madness. "The ones at Berkshire sucked. Almost as much as their cake did."

"You had cake?" My nose scrunches. "You hate it."

His focus is on the sizzling butter. On placing bread in the pan and adding the cheese.

"Kaleb?"

Another slice of bread. He presses both of them down with the spatula. As hard as I used to. I was eleven the last time I fixed those for him. I had to put all my strength into it. Kaleb is far stronger than I'll ever be.

He presses it hard anyway.

"Hey, you there?"

Silence.

Concern curls around my lungs. He senses my unease somehow, hooking an arm around my side and yanking me to him.

“You’re upset.” My forehead creases, my heart twisting. “Did I say something?”

“No.”

“Then talk to me.” I place a hand over the one he has on my shoulder, my touch soft. “Why’d you have cake? Someone forced you?”

“No.” A loaded silence. “It was the only way to celebrate your birthday, Shi.”

It should be impossible to have your heart crash and splinter on the floor while it’s still beating in your chest.

That’s what happens as I let his words sink in.

I’m devastated. Hurting. Hollow.

Again, he senses my pain, tightening his grip around me.

“You remembered?” I whisper. It’s hard to speak. Hard to breathe.

“Of course.”

Delicious aromas rise from the pan when he flips the sandwich. Kaleb smells better. Kaleb smells like home.

Kaleb is also deadly silent.

“They let you celebrate it? I—Damn it, I never asked. You told me your therapist let you keep the photos and mask, but other than that?” Fuck, could I be any more self-centered? Why haven’t I asked? “You could just go anywhere inside the facilities?”

“No.”

His fingers dig into my waist, his love language. His way of comforting me. I won’t be comforted. I won’t stop wishing I could magically go back in time and spare him every miserable second he’d spent locked up in there.

“Then?”

“I did what I had to.” He levels me with a dark gaze. “I pretended to be sick or started banging my head against the wall until I bled. Until one of the attendants or guards came for me.” Without turning away from me, he flips the sandwich in the pan. “Every year on your birthday, I made up some bullshit excuse to call them over there. Then I’d grab them by their throats, drag them out toward the kitchen. They let me have my way. Otherwise, they knew I’d murder their colleagues and wouldn’t lose sleep over it. They’d follow me all the way to the staff’s break room. They’d have cakes delivered each morning, and each year on your birthday, I’d stuff my face with a slice. Then I’d release my hostage. They’d jump on me, sedate me, and put me back in my cell where I slept through the day.”

Not a room. A *cell*. I get what he's saying. I get it better than I would've liked.

To him, it was a cell. A cell my father forced him into.

Caged. Tested.

Vilified.

The pressure in my chest intensifies.

He was willing to be sedated, hurt himself, all so he could celebrate my birthday.

Alone.

I won't cry. My tears would offend him, and I won't do that. He's been through enough.

I do something better, slipping an arm around him. Burrowing myself into his body, offering him my warmth.

Kaleb sets the grilled cheese on one of the plates. While my heart shreds into a million pieces.

When people look at him, they see a cold, heartless man. Emotionless. Steely.

They aren't wrong.

He's that, yeah. And so much more.

But that soft part of him isn't meant for them.

Kaleb saves and offers every ounce of his goodness to me.

He becomes kinder, warmer, and softer the more time we spend together. His warmth thaws the chill that had clung to my bones for so long.

Whereas I feel the unhinged parts of me unraveling in his presence. He needs me to be obsessive, possessive and his. I am. Always will be.

We're our true selves around each other. Like two pieces of a secret puzzle.

"Kaleb." I snuggle closer to him. It isn't just a hug.

It's an apology. It's my gratitude.

A penance.

Take my body, it says. *Take everything you need from me.*

"Shiloh." He squeezes me back. Painfully so.

I close my eyes, breathing him in.

"Worth it," he deadpans and my eyes open at his no-nonsense tone.

The spatula is no longer in his hand. It's been set on the counter, leaning against the pan. Kaleb has freed his hand to place two fingers beneath my chin, tilting my face up.

His gold eyes are darker, almost bronze-like. He steals my breath away.

He's dead serious. "Did you hear me?"

My breath hitches.

"Did you?"

I'm not sure. Not sure what he meant. Not sure that I want more gut-wrenching truths to come out of his mouth.

Unfortunately, there's no running from it. Year after year, he had no one. Kaleb was alone. He isn't anymore. Never will be.

"Worth what?"

"Worth. It." He dips his mouth to my cheek, kissing me first. His tongue swipes along the tears that stream down my cheeks. Fresh tears that fall without my permission.

Kaleb kisses them, then wipes them off the other cheek with his rough palm.

Claims them as his.

"I'm sorry." For so many things. For every single one of them.

"I said…" He sucks on my cheek. I sigh, and he lets out a low chuckle that reaches all the way down to my toes. "Worth it."

"You don't have to—"

"I'll keep repeating it for the rest of my life." His hand slides up from my waist, wrapping around the side of my neck. "You were worth it. The probing. The isolation. The guards, the attendants. Being away from you. Avenging you was worth it."

Goosebumps break out along my skin. I dig my fingers into his hoodie, and he groans, pulling me closer, angling my face to the side, pressing his lips to my other cheek.

He moans into my skin, and I arch my back for him. I can't help it. I'm not in charge of my own body.

I just need him.

"Your birthdays were the only times the fuckers made me take any drugs," he whispers, his lips rugged and soft at the same time. I'm dizzy. I'm sad. I'm his. "Wasn't the worst thing. Being forced to sleep for hours one day of the year. Worth it, Shi."

Pushing his chest, I put some space between us. I gawk at him.

Relief overwhelms me. I can't breathe.

He didn't take their drugs. He fooled everyone.

He manipulated them.

He won.

A sob rips from my chest. It's a visceral pain that I tried to suppress. I worked hard to put away the images Dad had planted in my head. Images of a drugged Kaleb. A suffering Kaleb.

It.

Hurts.

So bad.

Someone is carving me up from the inside.

Every sad, scary and depressing image of a suffering Kaleb shoots up to my consciousness. They never happened, but Dad made me imagine them.

It was the stuff my nightmares were made of. I'd wake up screaming. Wake up sweating and crying and—

None of that ever happened, I repeat. None of it. But it doesn't help when the images and repressed fear bang at my consciousness.

My wounded cry is feral, tortured. So pained that Kaleb turns off the stove, grabs my hips, and sets me on the counter.

"Tell me." He pushes himself between my thighs. My face is wrapped in his huge hands. This isn't a comforting touch. He's protecting me. Erecting a wall between me and the world. "Let me carry the pain for you. Let. Me."

"My pain?" Keeping my voice down is a true challenge.

I wish I could scream. I wish, with everything I have, that I could let some of it out. Kaleb would allow it. Would take it. I'm sure. Damn him. Damn him for taking on so much.

Even if we were all alone without any neighbors to worry about, I wouldn't dump more of my pain on him. Just no.

"You think it's too much? You think I can't take it? That it'll hurt me, hearing that your dad said I let them dope me? Huh?"

I can't hold back the tears. He's fine and alive, and the flashbacks are nothing but a figment of my imagination, but the pain won't go away.

"He said exactly that." I sniff, talking through my tears. "He said monsters deserve to be sedated."

"Okay, and he said that. So what?"

"Kaleb—"

"Take a look around you, Shiloh." He switches his grip on my face. My chin is in his large palm, and he shoves my face left and right. Up toward the ceiling. Back to him. "See the fucks I give anywhere?"

“No. It’s not what he said.” Blinking away my tears, I punch his chest, that’s much stronger than any real-life wall. He’s a shield made of diamonds. Impenetrable. “He said those things so I’d fear you. So I’d want nothing to do with you, the only person who ever loved me. All he cared about was making sure I never came for you, never tried to do anything to save you. That’s how he manipulated me.” Deep breath. I hate this part. Shame floods me. “Most days, I’d fall for it. I had been scared of you. I loved you, and that scared me too.”

“Not good enough.” He moves in as close as he can. The counter stops him, so he drags me to him by my hips. “Tell me the exact words he said to you. I won’t let it haunt you. Tell. Me.”

“*The vile murderer is stuck there for life,*” I mimic my dad’s voice. I won’t repeat that shit as if I’m the one saying it. As if a shred of me still thinks it. “*Doped out of his mind. He’ll never be released, his doctors report back to me. He doesn’t make any progress. He’ll kill again, that’s a guarantee. You’re a fool to ask about him, Shiloh. If he’s ever out, he’ll come after you first.*”

Kaleb’s face betrays nothing. Briefly, I wonder if he’s even heard me.

“Bastard.” He pulls his lips in. His chest expands, then deflates.

“He’s wrong.” I reach out for his neck, cupping both sides.

“I wouldn’t say that.” Kaleb lets out a mirthless laugh. “I am a monster. I did come back here to wreak havoc and murder our parents. But I’m here to steal the princess, not kill her. And about my meds? Like I mentioned, they couldn’t force me. They tried, and I threw them up as soon as I was alone again.”

Oh. That’s how he knew what to do this morning, with his fingers down my throat. His fingers curled in just the right angle, efficient in making me throw up.

“Deep down, I never gave up on you. I hoped you’d be back. Prayed for it.” A flush climbs up my neck. My cheeks.

Kaleb cocks his head to the side, studying me. Clawing his way under my skin. “I saw the letters. I know you did. What are you not telling me?”

“I wished you weren’t completely out of it so that…” My fingers sink into him, borrowing strength from the strongest person in the world. “That you’d be back, and we could be together like this. I hoped that you’d kill me if you had to. Other than that, I wished for this. You were my secret.”

“From him?” He doesn’t have to shout. He’s just as bone-chilling when he hisses.

“From everyone.” I need his warmth for this, inching closer. “I wasn’t ashamed of you. I could never. It was Dad. He made me swear not to talk about you. And since I didn’t want to talk about anything else, I kept to myself. I was always yours and you were mine. Then Val and…”

Marina. I sigh as I remember her. Another person who thought the worst things about Kaleb.

“They were kind. They pretended nothing happened when we talked on the phone, mostly.” I shrug. “That’s it. You were my secret. In my heart. That was more than enough, even when I feared you. I always loved you.”

“You spent years alone.” His expression hardens. The muscles of his jaw work. “Basically by yourself.” His brow furrows, his fingers inflicting pain on my chin. A pain that reminds me that I’m still alive. That I’m his. “You could’ve chosen the easy way out. You could’ve accepted that I was a monster and moved on with your life. Had friends. Gone to parties.”

His hands find my cheeks again.

My chin quivers as my legs press around him. “I didn’t have a choice. I didn’t want another life. I was yours from day one. Day fucking one, Kaleb.”

“No, you’re wrong. With me at Berkshire, you had plenty of choices.” He’s as serious as I’d ever seen him. As intense. Satisfied that I chose him. I brought these emotions out of him. Me. “Now you have none.”

“What’s next? After we kill our parents?” I skim my fingers over his neck, up to his jaw. He sucks in a breath, pressing his forehead to mine. “You have a plan set in place. I know you do.”

“We’ll take our parents’ money. They have safes around the house.” One day, when Dad was drunk, he blabbered about the safes. The money he was hiding from the IRS. Before the three of us, Kaleb, me, and his mom. “Pay for our new IDs, birth certificates and passports. That’s Jerome’s job. Then we get the hell out of this country. Where no one recognizes us.”

“Yes.”

His eyes glimmer at my enthusiastic response. Darkness settles over them a second later.

My teeth lock with fear, breasts are swollen with lust.

“Before that, as in right this fucking minute, you’ll go to the bathroom.” Our breakfast date is officially postponed. Kaleb is in the mood, and I’m

greedy for every ounce of his depravity. “Shave your legs. Your pretty pussy. Wait for me there. We’re going to play out our fantasy.” His hands slide beneath my hoodie. The pads of his fingers stroke and sear me. His touch is confident. Sensual. “Go on. Stop wasting my time, little sister.”

The underlying threat has my heart swooping. Galloping.

Once he places me on the floor, his hand points in the direction of the bedroom.

I shiver. I crave him.

I run.

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KALEB

My cock tents my sweats. The need for her claws at my sanity.

The moments of me being sweet and caring are gone.

Blown in the wind.

Poof.

She has no idea. No fucking clue what I'm about to do to her.

She thinks she does. Before she left for the bathroom, I saw a glimmer in her eyes. A little fear. A lot of excitement.

Well, then.

I count down the seconds. Listen to her clothes dropping to the floor and the sound of her ripping the razor pack.

She expects role play. Thinks I'll reenact the scene I laid out for her in the clinic play-by-play.

Voyeurism. Some gentle, consensual forcing. Pleasure, mainly.

Something that many would consider sweet.

As much as I love her, I can't be sweet for too long. Can't be anyone else but myself.

I'll spend the rest of my life protecting her. Worshiping her. Owning her. I'm never letting go.

But being sweet isn't on the table. I won't ever eat her out without biting her. Won't fuck her without leaving marks on her body. I'll always get off on her fear, her pain, her tears.

Her breasts have bruises on them in the shape of my teeth. Her neck is black and blue from sucking on it so fucking hard.

The scar on her shoulder, let’s just say the mangled skin is a shade or two darker now, thanks to me. I made sure of that.

Watching her shave and jacking off under the bed will be the starting point.

After that, I’ll hurt her.

I’ll use the items I set up in the kitchen earlier when she was asleep.

She’ll beg me to stop.

She’ll love every second of it.

The water starts running in the sink. My heart beats steadily as my body prepares for this. For her.

I head to the bedroom.

The door to the connected bathroom is half-closed. Her addition to our game, I assume. A way to let me walk around undetected.

My sweet, clever, masochistic stepsister.

Her humming filters from behind the door. Rising over the water stream.

As usual, Shiloh is out of tune.

Twisted. Weird. Off.

Like me.

Another person might’ve found the jagged and high-pitched melody disturbing. A turn-off.

Not me.

Her off-tune humming gets me hard as a rock. The need to choke her with my cock intensifies. Instead of acting on it, I hide under the bed. Waiting for her there.

A movement from the bathroom grabs my attention.

The door opens to the inside, offering me a view of the bathroom sink. And of Shiloh.

My dirty, naked princess is holding a razor just over her leg. She has a hand pressed to the wall behind her for balance. A delicate foot leans on the low sink, opening her up for me.

She’s soaked. She came more than once this morning and she’s still wet for me. Inner thighs. Her pussy is so fucking inviting.

Her entire body is hot for this. Chest, neck, and face are flushed red. Her breasts rise and fall, each heaved breath getting me harder. Turning me into a man that isn’t really a man. Not a beast, either.

I’m the devil. The monster in her story.

My nerve endings are frayed. My need for her is a living entity inside of me.

I reach into my sweats. Fist my dick and squeeze. My eyes roll at the temporary relief.

It takes the edge off.

Good. I need these minutes to stalk her. I'm throbbing for it, for this act. She pretends to be the innocent, sweet, and clueless girl, and she does it well. I almost forget that it's fake.

A shiver has her hand trembling despite her firm grip on the razor. A low tremble that betrays her excitement as she lowers it to her pussy.

My cock jerks at that. Precum wets the tip, and I rub it along the head, tugging at the barbell.

The things she's doing to me. That fire. The loss of control.

She keeps humming this tune. She's butchering it.

She's repeating it over and over for my sake.

My focus might be off. My attention may lie mostly on the blades coursing over her smooth, perfect cunt. On the lips I shaved before we went to bed.

I recognize it nonetheless.

Finally. She's humming *The Exorcist*'s theme song. We watched it together the night I moved into her home.

A day I'll remember for the rest of my life.

At eleven, she was way too young to watch horror movies.

I didn't say a word to her until that evening. Didn't invite her to join me at night when I put it on.

And yet, as the first scene played on the TV screen, she found me there. Her feet padded on the wood, announcing her arrival. Wearing her flower-patterned pajamas, she snuggled to my side. Patted my mask once, then sat still throughout the movie. I carried her sleeping form to the bed later that night.

Our connection felt foreign back then.

I get it now.

She was always supposed to come home. To me.

First, to claim her place as my little sister.

Later, *much later*, as my woman.

I block the memories of her as a kid out of my head. My dick's gone soft thinking of her as a child, and fuck that.

We’re two grown-ups today. Hunter and prey.

Except the prey is equally as vicious as the hunter.

This is her third round of swiping the blade over her pussy, only this time she opens her legs wider. Moving it closer to the center.

So close that the razor brushes her clit.

She cries out, as if that was an accident. Her pretty lips round in the shape of an O.

She isn’t cutting herself. She’s flirting with the idea. With the pain.

The tempting little thing repeats the movement. My cock is instantly hard, begs for relief at the sound of another one of her pained cries. At the moan that follows.

Shiloh soaks her thighs, grinding her hips. Her bruised nipples harden.

The scene pushes a moan right out of my lungs.

Her blue eyes cut to the bedroom. Wide. Frantic.

“W-who’s there?” Her voice, goddamn it. She isn’t faking it. The longer she’s been pretending, the more real it’s become for her.

I wish I wouldn’t have forgotten my mask. The shield I wear.

The range of emotions that must be crossing my face is embarrassing.

Want. Need. Craving.

Love.

I’m open. Raw. Exposed.

It’s like having a foreign entity tearing me from the inside out. Clawing at my skin.

Loving Shiloh is agony.

Tucking my dick in has never been this frustrating. But I have to be patient. Fucking got to.

Her eyebrows rise when I don’t answer her, head tilting as she searches for the source of the sound from her place in the bathroom.

“Hello?”

The razor clanks as she drops it into the sink. She pushes off the wall, placing her foot on the floor. I follow her movements, like I did the first time I slept under her bed.

She’s getting close.

Closer. Closer. Closer.

“I heard you.” The tremor in her voice is my cue.

It’s the reason I snap.

I catch her ankle in a vise grip.

“Oh!” she gasps, kicking her foot. A feeble attempt to get me off her while I grab her harder and crawl out from under the bed. She doesn’t give it her best, even though she’s whisper-shouting, “Let go of me!”

Her fight gets her nowhere.

That’s what love is, isn’t it?

Fixation. Obsession. Domination.

Refusing to hear the word *no*.

As I rise to my full height, I change my hold on her. I release her ankle and just as fast grab her hips, then neck.

Her heated flesh and racing heartbeat are why I’m throbbing in my sweats. Why I see nothing else other than her plump, gaping lips.

There’s only one light at the end of the tunnel for me. An intense force that pulls at my goddamn bones.

Shiloh.

Always Shiloh.

Our dirty game turns her on.

Me? It drives me fucking wild.

Patience.

She opens her mouth wider as a scream lodges in her throat. It practically vibrates beneath my fingers, and holy shit.

My filthy girl is asking me to stop her.

My absolute pleasure.

Using my hand on her hips, I yank her to my body. She’s flush against me, and I take advantage of her sexy gasp by shoving two fingers down her throat.

“Adorable.” My voice is husky, meant for her and her alone while I fuck her throat with my fingers. “You think you can scream? Think you have a chance of making it out of this alive?”

Her throat constricts around me. Her choked, gagging sounds annihilate what’s left of my humanity.

I take her to the bed, shoving her back on the mattress. Pushing her toward the pillows and crawling up her body. “You don’t.”

She opens her mouth to scream and fails a second time. I’m back to finger-fucking her mouth, caging her beneath me with the other forearm close to her pretty face. I’m on my knees, legs bracketing hers.

There’s no escaping this.

Oh, she wiggles. Oh, she gives me a run for my money. She claws at my wrists. Growls at me.

She's putting everything into it, her nostrils flaring with the effort.

"You got yourself into this mess." Using my weight to keep her pressed to the bed, I reach back to the collar of my hoodie. Pin my hips to hers as I prepare to whip it up and over my head. "This is what you get for seducing a monster."

She's thrashing beneath me, rubbing her sweet body on my dick. Tears prick the corners of her eyes when she realizes how hard I am for her. That every inch of my fat cock is going inside her.

Lust, the truly depraved kind, swirls inside me. I pull my fingers out of her throat and whip my hoodie over my head.

Before she can catch her breath, I wring my hoodie and stuff it in her mouth. I make sure it stays in place by pinning the sleeves to the pillows next to her head, leaning on both hands so it remains there.

The thick fabric mutes her fake scream.

While her fingers cut through my shoulders, her eyes wander down my naked chest. She's helpless against it, and I get off on her gaze as she takes me in. Selfishly, I let her have her fill.

I'll never get used to her appreciation. The meaning she gives to my miserable existence.

But other things have the same effect on me. Urges that are beyond my control.

"Come here." I flip her over, tying my hoodie around her head. She cries out, kicking me, her hands reaching back.

"Such a fucking brat."

In a flash, I turn her onto her back again. I reach to the side, and one of the lamps on the nightstand is in my grip. I yank it out of the wall, wielding it over Shiloh's face.

A silent threat. Her face pales, her fear palpitating between us. Goddamn addictive.

She whimpers. The tears that have welled in her eyes now run down her temples.

"Here's how it's going to go." At my narrowed eyes, she breaks out in shivers. More tears slip out. I breathe in her terror. Absorb every ounce of it. "I need to get something from the kitchen and I need you to stay put. Disobey me and…"

I rear my arm back. She shakes her head like a good little victim.

“I will bash your face in.” *Never*. “Then I’ll sodomize your corpse. I’ll take great pleasure in it. Will go through every hole, including the new one I’ll crack through your skull. So now, are you going to stay put?”

This game is an act. Fake through and through.

Her fear isn’t. I can taste it on my tongue. See it in her bulging eyes, the tears cascading from them. She’s pulling away. Sinking into the bed while her shivers intensify.

For. Me.

“Blink once for yes.” I thrust my hips forward, forcing a moan out of her. Most of the sound is absorbed by my hoodie, but I can still hear it. I ache for all of her moans.

It mortifies her, to make these sounds for a monster. The flush of her cheeks deepens. She sobs into her gag, and it’s gorgeous.

“Blink, damn it, or I won’t wait to punish you.” What’s taking her forever? Can’t she see how desperate I am to be inside her? Or is she begging me to do the unthinkable? “I’ll put this lamp to good use if you don’t give me my answer on the count of five. One…”

In an instant, her brow creases. Eyebrows shooting down. Eyes slammed shut.

“Good girl.”

She opens them then, blue eyes glossed over. Furious too.

Losing to me hurts.

“I’ll kiss it better.” Terror returns, flashing over her face. I don’t remember the last time I laughed, if ever. I chuckle now, the sound is wicked. “When I’m ready.”

She growls, but wisely stays in place. She’s a lifelike doll, allowing me to spread her legs apart and position her as I see fit.

Heading to the kitchen, I almost smile to myself. I have no regrets. None.

Why would I when my cruelty makes her wet?

A lighter is waiting for me in one of the cupboards where I hid it. Inside a silver mixing bowl.

My painful erection is tenting my sweats as I set both items on the counter. Loving Shiloh had been a constant itch while I was locked up. A never-ending headache. A snake’s bite that’d spread poison throughout my body for years.

I’m no stranger to pain. In fact, I welcome it. I’m here to take her. And she’s here for it. All of it.

My fucked-up existence belongs to her, and she is mine.

Mine. Mine. Mine.

Last but not least, ice.

That was here since I moved in. Lukewarm water offends me.

The cubes clink into the bowl, filling it up.

Perfect.

When I materialize in the doorway to our bedroom, my heart nearly stops in my chest. Shiloh hasn’t moved an inch. She’s in the same position, down to her spread legs.

Her taut nipples are an invitation. Her arousal begs to be licked.

Then there’s her gaze. Her eyes are drawn to my abs, the blue in them darkening. My body is a momentary distraction before she sees what I have in my hands.

Her chest heaves. Goosebumps race over her soft skin.

What’s that? she asks wordlessly.

“That, my precious victim, is a lighter.” As I step closer, I roll the wheel. Fire sparks.

Disappears the moment I get my fill of Shiloh’s panicked stare. Her body frozen in place.

“Such a good fucking girl.” I’m standing near the edge of the bed, jingling the mixer bowl. Letting her hear its contents rattling inside it. “I brought ice cubes with me. Sure, I could take your pussy with my cock. Could make you cry, make you hate yourself for coming for a monster. It’d mess up this pretty little head of yours. That’s a guarantee.”

A hum through her gag. The fabric is getting darker, her spit soaking it. There aren’t too many things as beautiful and alluring as watching Shiloh being stripped of her power.

And my hoodie isn’t the only part of her that’s soaking.

“Except that’ll be boring as fuck.” I place the bowl on the bed on the other side of her. Take a seat next to her leg that’s closer to me. “Worse than that. It’ll be predictable. I might even yawn.”

Her thighs strain when I bring the lighter to her opening. She’s swollen and pink, so wet she’s dripping into the bed. She should be punished for being a temptation.

For almost—*almost*—interfering with my plans.

She will.

“What I have in store for you isn’t boring at all.” When I start dragging the lighter in and out of her pussy, her whole body jolts. Her muscles flex, her pussy clenching. Resisting it has to hurt. I’ve never been one to be opposed to pain. “Look at you. Trying to fuck the lighter.”

Helpless, delicious sounds slip past her gag, rattling my bones. I shove the lighter as far as it’d go, then pull it out of her.

I stare at Shiloh, studying her with my head cocked to the side.

It takes one, two, three tries to light up the soaked lighter. I’m a persistent fucker and nothing gets in my way. Nothing will stop me when it comes to her.

We’re both ensnared by the flame for the long seconds I keep my thumb on the wheel.

Time passes and then I’m sure the metal is hot enough. I snuff out the fire. Press my lips and blow so the metal won’t burn her.

“I have no use for your cunt if it’s damaged. It’ll stay in one piece,” I explain through clenched teeth.

That’s the last straw for her when I lower the heated lighter between her thighs.

Her cries turn into something that sounds a lot like, *please*. Her legs close.

Her fear and desperation are palpable, and I’m eating both right the fuck up.

“No, no, no.” I spread her back open, being ruthless as I shove the lighter in and out of her. As I violate her cunt. “Be good.”

Her body trembles. She’s shaking her head, thrashing it from left to right. An orgasm builds inside her regardless of how hard she’s trying to get me off her.

I’ve been studying her for days. I know her tells. What she looks like when she’s close.

She is. Being fucked by a hot lighter does that to her.

Not me. A lighter.

What the hell. I’m not supposed to be jealous of the motherfucking object.

Except I am. Because she’s coming on it.

Shiloh’s back arches up off the bed, her tears soaking her temples as she murmurs, “No, no, no.”

“Why bother lying?” I can barely get the words out, I’m so wound up. So consumed by how she reacts to the sickest parts of me. “Pretending you don’t want this. You can’t hide from me. Your cunt sucks me in. I bet…” I bite my bottom lip, groaning as Shiloh’s arousal drips down my hand. I continue to pump her with the lighter, despite the overwhelming jealousy. “That if I lit it up inside you, you’d come even harder.”

“No!” she screams through my hoodie. Still gasping for air. Still coming down from the high. “No!”

“Yes. Another day.” I won’t. But fuck, that fear in her eyes.

My restraint is hanging by a thread. A live wire about to snap. I wanted to elongate our game. Torture her over and over. Fire and ice. Ice and fire. One orgasm chasing the other.

Impossible.

I’m out of my sweats and on top of her fast, throwing the lighter somewhere in the room. Shiloh hardly realizes I’m hovering over her, her pained gaze slightly lost. It focuses on me the second I push the first ice cube into her pussy.

The abrupt switch from hot to cold has her nostrils flaring. Her body stills, a living statue as I slip the ice cube as deep as it will go.

“That’s it.” I stroke her temple, rough knuckles on soft skin. “That’s what pain looks like. And shock. Fuck, you’re stunning when you’re hurting. No one’s ever worn an emotion as beautifully as you do.”

To the sounds of her anguished moans, I trail my fingers up and down her cold pussy. In and out of her. The ice melts, and my cock thickens as the ice water trickles out of her.

I lean in, adding to her pain by sinking my teeth into her neck. Sucking on her skin. Leaving another mark among many.

“You can take another ice cube before I stuff you with my cock.” We’re both panting and moaning. I bend down to her breasts, biting and licking her nipple. Pain and comfort. Another mind-fuck. “It’ll hurt. But you’ll take it, won’t you?”

She doesn’t answer with a yes or no. Doesn’t nod or shake her head. I reach for another ice cube anyway, and push it inside her. No foreplay this time. No seeing if it fits.

None of that.

The ice goes straight inside. Stretching her.

She screeches, finally shaking her head. She's grinding on my hand, her hips working to get more of me inside her. Her eyes roll as her moans get louder.

"Look at me." This part has nothing to do with torture. This is me, needing her eyes on me. My chest aches with how much I need it.

She's exhausted. Dazed. Her eyes slide lower from the ceiling to me.

Slower than I would've liked.

I have one hand cupping her pussy, keeping the ice inside. With the free one, I grab her chin and tip it up.

"When I tell you to look at me, you look. At. Me."

She opens her mouth wider, lips parting on the wrung hoodie. Her eyelashes flutter.

Please, take it off. Please, kiss me.

This isn't part of the game.

I shouldn't yield to her.

I do.

I pull the hoodie down, letting it hang around her neck.

"Kaleb."

"Shut up."

Whatever she has to say, she'll have to let her body do the talking for her. Those swollen, glistening lips are mine. I'm beyond self-control. Past anything other than crushing my mouth to hers, kissing her for all I'm worth.

We kiss as if there'll be no more after this one. Our tongues swipe and taste one another. We tilt our heads, changing angles to deepen the kiss. To reach into the other person's soul, it feels like.

For years, I'd been convinced that I wasn't born with one.

Even the staff at Berkshire thought I wasn't. That I was the boogeyman incarnate. They treated me as you would a great white shark. Cautiously. From a safe distance. Not like a person to be cared about.

It'd taken Dr. Reynolds six years to see me in his clinic without handcuffs on my wrists and ankles.

When I'm with Shiloh, I see that I do have a soul. She owns it. She knows how to wake it. How to control it.

I couldn't resist her if I tried.

"There'll be no one else for you." I suck in a breath, shoving my cock inside her.

Fuck, that's cold. The ice. Her cunt. Nowhere to run. Between her tight pussy and the ice cube, I have no choice but to accept the sensations. The pain.

We're sharing it, drowning in it. Lost to it.

"No one." I lift my hips. Slam back into her. "Oh, *fuck*." Again. "No one else, Shi. This cunt is mine."

"Yours." Her voice is hoarse, hitching every time I rut into her. "Only"—*thrust*—"ever"—*fuck, that's good*—"yours."

"If you so much as look at another man, he's dead."

The cheap bed rattles. My dick is soaked and thickening inside her. She gasps as my barbell grazes her sensitive pussy.

God, I love being inside her. Love wrapping my hand around her throat and cutting off some of her air supply.

"If you so much as think of another man, I'll chop his fingers off, put them in a blender. I'll make you drink them."

Of course I won't. I say this shit and rub her clit just the way she likes to turn her on. To get her to give me another orgasm. She's close, her pussy gripping me tighter, and I find her lips again, groaning into her mouth.

She screams into mine, her climax resounding all through my body. Imprinting her essence into my bones.

My orgasm follows soon after, and I shoot my cum into Shiloh in quick, harsh strokes. The ice has melted all over my dick. My orgasm mixes with hers.

"Nothing's better than this." Her eyebrows scrunch, so I continue, "This, being together. Even in this shitty place. Even while we're on the run. Sharing the same air as you is the best thing to have ever happened to me, Shiloh."

I untie my hoodie, remove it from around her neck, and kiss her. Pull her into my arms and kiss her over and over.

She's cold, slight tremors coursing through her and my protective side is in full force. I draw the covers over us, hug her close. My lips press to her temple. Her arms wrap around my neck.

We have a lifetime of this waiting for us. A compensation for years of being torn apart. Of suffering.

"I still can't believe you'd say that." Her fingers dig into my skin. As if I'm going anywhere without her. "After everything I've put you through. That being with me is the best part."

“You’ve made this life worth living.” I tip her chin up, knowing that wherever we go, we’ll be together. Preferably a country that has skies the color of her eyes. The only shade of blue that exists for me. “You, little sister.”

More questions surface in her eyes. More pain and self-reprimand.

I won’t have it.

I have a hand around the back of her neck, bringing her forehead to my shoulder. Her lips are hot on my skin. Our bodies are as close and connected as our souls.

“You’ve done the same for me, Kaleb. You make it *all* worth it.” Her hot breath tickles my skin, her hesitation as sweet as hearing the words “Big brother.”

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31

KALEB

Human connection.

Such a foreign fucking concept.

Small touches. Hushed conversations. Lingering eye contact.

I never understood them.

And not for lack of trying.

Silently, I'd watch them. People on the street. Kids in school. I'd be curious to understand what they saw in it that I couldn't.

Eventually, I got bored. I kept to myself.

Then, I became Shiloh's stepbrother.

Then everything clicked.

Every bone in my body craved that connection. Her nearness. Her smiles.

The trust she placed in me whenever her father stepped into the room. It was more than a feeling. It was a metaphorical blanket that she cast over me.

Just like her serious expression when she looked at me when I wore my mask. She was the only one to ever see through me.

The only one who wanted to make sense of the kid behind the mask.

Shiloh had no ulterior motive. She wasn't doing it so she could point out and laugh at the soulless freak she'd find underneath.

She cared about me, and I *wanted* that. From her and no one else.

Shiloh reached into my marrow. Worked her magic. Changed the genetic map of my distorted DNA.

She still does that.

I still want it.

That's why I've been soaking up every ounce of her attention over the past few days in the Davis's apartment, where we've been cocooned together. Where we connected and fucked and talked and breathed each other in.

I couldn't get enough of her. Her sweet gasps. Her voice. The adoration in her glinting blue eyes. Her attentiveness when I told her about my years at Berkshire.

Her tight cunt. How it squeezes me when she comes.

Making her come is one of my favorite things to do.

Doing her is my favorite of them all.

"It's not fair." She lets out a nervous giggle. It rings in the small space of the Davis's car, filtering through her mask.

Yes, hers.

Dark with red Xs for eyes. A red smile.

A mask identical to the one I'm wearing, except mine is neon blue.

My old ones wouldn't have worked for this particular mission. We needed something new for our fresh start. We bought them online, choosing the creepy masks together.

We'll kill our parents together, too.

As soon as we start walking.

It's a short distance to get to their home. Less than a few dozen feet, really.

We pulled up behind one of the bigger houses. The license plate of our getaway car will stay hidden that way. Away from their cameras and motion sensor lights.

Shiloh huffs, and it's adorable. She's expecting me to ask her *what isn't fair?*

She has things she wants to say to me.

Before I ask her, I stare outside the windshield and onto the street.

Letting her wait is another sick, fucked-up turn-on. Her anticipation tastes as sweet as everything about her.

So yeah, I look outside.

There are people everywhere. Adults, teenagers, and kids in costumes. They don't spare a glance our way. They are busy prancing around as skeletons, witches, and ghosts.

They’re buzzing the intercoms so the people in the other mansions fill their pumpkin buckets with candy.

Celebrating Halloween without a care in the world.

This won’t be the case for our parents.

Confusion will come first. Shock second. Terror will be the last thing on their minds before they die.

Shiloh’s hand clutches onto mine. I’m done making her wait.

“What isn’t fair?” I trail my fingertips over the edge of her mask. Thread them into her hair that she’s left down. So thick. So smooth. Begging to be tugged.

Later.

“That you can pull off any mask.”

Poor thing, she’s nervous as hell. I’ve studied enough people to catalog this as anxious babbling. Clipped words. High-pitched voice.

She’s talking for the sake of talking. Because it soothes her.

No need. That’s what I’m here for.

I decide that, after all, this is the right time to yank on her hair. Shiloh rewards me with an erotic gasp that has my cock jerking.

Later. For real this time.

“Kaleb, what are you doing?” she asks, but doesn’t swat my hand away.

I tilt my head. “Do I have your attention, little sister?”

“We’re going to be late.” She’s talking about the meeting her dad’s secretary arranged for her at his home. “He’ll notice something’s up and—”

A harder yank it is, then. She cries out, and I angle my body over the console, towering over her. “Do. I. Have. Your. Attention?”

“Yes,” she whimpers, and her pain gets me harder. Her pain turns me into a vicious man. I love that her anxiety is eating her alive, yet she can’t help but lean into me. The monster. The man who gives her what she needs instead of what she wants. “Yes.”

“We’re going to go in there.” I relay the plan we ran through at least ten times today. It soothes her. Helps her focus.

“Yes.”

“We’ll get the safes’ combinations. We’ll kill them.”

“What if—”

Like a snake, I slither a hand around her throat. Squeeze.

Silencing her.

“Anything can happen once we’re there.” I groan at her rapid pulse, how it flutters beneath my fingertips. “It won’t change the outcome. Both of them will die, and we’ll get out of there no matter what. And, yeah, they might wound us if they try, sure.”

A shudder sweeps through her. I choke her harder. Showing her the only thing she should worry about is me.

“We could be harmed. But we’ll live. We’ve gone through too much. Spent years apart when we should’ve been together.” The twinge of pain in my heart isn’t self-pity. I ache for her. For what she’d gone through in my absence. I didn’t realize the impact it had on her until I returned to her life. Never again. “We’re ending it now. Any threat to us will be eliminated tonight. It’s you and me for fucking ever. This is it. Understood?”

Hesitation shifts into confidence. Her shoulders square, hand clutching my black hoodie. “Understood.”

“Good girl.” I rub her neck with my thumb. Loosening my grip on her hair.

We climb out of the car, pull our hoods over our heads, and blend into the street.

The colors are more vivid from this up close.

Orange, purple, and red lights hang on the gates and houses. Fake cobwebs, skeletons, and giant spiders decorate every home in the street. Frankenstein, Anabelle, and life-size vampire dolls are scattered around.

A persistent undercurrent inside me demands I do something about the people walking around us. Catch the closest adult by the throat, strangle them, then hang them up on the nearest gate.

Strange how the need is stronger than it was when I was a kid.

Now, all I see are potential victims.

My hunger should’ve been sated after killing so many people since I left Berkshire.

It hasn’t. If anything, it’s multiplied.

But it’s not out of control.

Besides, I’ll have plenty of blood on my hands soon enough.

Shiloh squeezes my hand. “You’re quiet.”

“Just thinking.”

“About?”

“Nothing good.” I squeeze her head back, staring at the red Xs on her mask. The red smile. The color of blood.

“Hmm.” She nods, understanding me through our silent communication. “You were looking at the houses.”

“They’re nice.”

She’s still nervous. I gesture toward the expansive lawns, the people. Pretend that we’re a normal couple strolling through the neighborhood to distract her.

“I don’t hate it. I didn’t have any of it growing up. Then we moved in with you, but I got sent away to Berkshire right before we could decorate. So, yeah. They’re nice.”

“Oh.”

I’m trying to calm her down. That’s why I’m rambling. In the process, I’ve opened up too much. I don’t hate it. It’s just fucking weird that I want to explain myself to her.

“Dad didn’t allow Mom to go to work.” A few more feet, and we’ll reach our old home. In the meantime, I talk to her. “He never earned much. That’s why we couldn’t afford decorations or anything like that. Not like anyone ever cared to celebrate anything in our home.”

Talking time is over. We’ve made it to the Talbots’ gates.

She could’ve done this by herself. She’s strong and fierce as fuck.

She thinks she needs me.

She doesn’t.

It’s me. *I* need her to need me.

Pressing a hand to the small of her back, I play the role of her personal bodyguard as I tower over her. I’m her human shield while she punches in the code on the digital screen that will let us through.

The gates open seamlessly.

“Shi.” I press two fingers to her chin, tipping her face up to me. We can’t go in there if she’s feeling off. After all, this is for her. The beating of my heart. The squeeze and release of my lungs. This revenge. “I’d rather have you in there, but if you’re not up to—”

She flattens her gloved hand on my chest. Cocks her head to the side.

Mimicking me. God, what a fucking turn-on. “We won’t get caught.”

An assurance. That’s what she’s asking of me.

I shouldn’t be relieved that this is what’s bothering her. That this isn’t about her having second thoughts.

I’m repulsed by how relieved I feel. I surrender to it.

Shiloh is my twisted little thing.

She wants me just the way I am.

Faulty. Broken. Murderous.

“Never,” I reassure her, taking the first steps inside and guiding her alongside me. “We’re never getting caught.”

Manicured lawns line either side of the driveway. Sweeping gardens, bushes, and flowers look like they came out of a magazine.

Floodlights illuminate our way to the mansion that grows closer and closer. The brick walls are right there, about thirty feet from where we are.

The familiar arched wood and glass door come into view, engulfed by two sconces on the walls.

Years-old hate twists my chest.

This view is the last thing I saw the last time I was here. When police officers dragged me out and thrusted me into one of the cruisers on the property. My mother stayed inside, barricaded in her room where Shiloh’s dad had ordered her to wait for him.

She wasn’t there.

Shiloh was.

She followed us out, stood in the doorway. Backlit by the blaring lights from inside the house.

Pink pajama set. Wide blue eyes. Hand reaching out to me.

Please, she mouthed. *Please, don’t go*.

Then her dad grabbed her forearm and threw her back inside.

Fucker. I would’ve killed him if it wasn’t for the goddamn cops.

“You and me. Forever,” she vows.

Our hands squeeze one another at the same time.

“Forever.”

She rings the doorbell.

Footsteps echo on the black-and-white marble floor.

Trick-or-trick, motherfuckers.

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SHILOH

My gut twists. My heart is weighed down to the floor.

The hair on the back of my neck stands on end.

I haven't visited my father in months. Since the day I blackmailed him into signing the contract that'd enable me to live here unbothered. Close to Kaleb.

In a way, Dad won that day. I blew my cover. Showed him that after years of manipulation, Kaleb still mattered to me the most.

His days of fucking us over are over.

Footsteps approach the door. I know, without seeing the person, that it isn't Dad.

Ronan Talbot is a snake, head to toe. You wouldn't hear him coming. His staff, you wouldn't hear them, either. My father fired people for much less than making noise as they walked.

The closer the man inside my dad's home gets, I realize I'm right.

While my father is tall, imposing, and lean, this person is short. Pudgy.

"Dr. Reynolds." Kaleb bristles. He shoves me behind him, never letting go of my hand. "Fucker."

"He's alone?" This wasn't a part of the plan. I was sure I scared Kaleb's psychiatrist back into hiding. I peek around him, squinting my eyes to see through the frosted glass in the door. "Where's your mom? Where's Dad?"

Deep down, I already know the answer. My dad and his mom are either dead or badly injured.

I'm surprised by how that fact doesn't bother me.

They've earned it, both of them.

What scares me is having Dr. Reynolds here instead.

Dad might be—or might *have been*—a terrible person. Violent. Short-fused. Hateful.

A predictable one. I could handle him.

This psycho isn't something either of us have anticipated.

We have no idea what to expect from him.

I thought it was bad before. That Dr. Reynolds just wanted to use us for research purposes or to write a book about us.

As much as I loathed the idea, in a way, it was harmless.

Him being here, hurting people to get to Kaleb—that's a nightmare.

Shit.

Kaleb moves to block me from his therapist again.

"Kaleb Leo Blackwood." I hear the therapist clapping his hands once. His voice is warm as if he's welcoming us to *his* home. "My favorite patient. I've been expecting you."

Of course he guessed it was Kaleb behind the mask. My man is his obsession. He's been studying him for years.

"You had orders," my stepbrother hisses.

A chill runs up my spine. I would've hightailed it out of here had I been Dr. Reynolds.

Except he's too far gone to recognize the threat for what it is.

"Well." Another two loud footsteps toward us. His shoes click on the floor. "This distance between us wasn't working for me."

"Where are they?"

Kaleb doesn't give a fuck about them, no. He's buying us time, dragging information out of the doctor.

"You care about them? That's new." By his tone, I can tell he's just as curious as he'd ever been. "An interesting development."

Kaleb's murderous energy vibrates in the air, almost choking me.

"Stop where you are." His grip on my wrist threatens to crack the bones.

"I missed you, son."

"Not your son."

I want to see what's going on there. I need to be a part of it. To help Kaleb, in case this man has more tricks up his unhinged sleeve.

I won't. Any movement I make will distract Kaleb. Will make him vulnerable.

But it hurts, to be this helpless. This useless. My heart, most of all, demands that I come to his defense like I wouldn't and couldn't eleven years ago.

"Kaleb, you wound me." My hackles rise. He's too close to us. I glance between Kaleb's legs and there it is, the tips of Dr. Reynolds's tethered brown shoes. Fuck, that can't be good. "I had such high hopes for you. Thought you'd appreciate that I came here. The things I've done. The connection I've tried to establish with you through my actions. I understand you better, too, now that I've killed your other parent. You started it, and I finished it. Isn't it wonderful?"

My throat locks. I try to swallow. Try again.

Give up.

Because a repressed memory surges to the surface, and I can't breathe.

"Grease?" I asked Kaleb from my place on the floor. I sat at his side, my brow scrunching. I wasn't sure I heard him right. "He died from grease?"

He tilted his head, the black holes he had for eyes staring at me. For a moment, I thought he'd stay silent. Kaleb wasn't a talker. Even around me, there was only so much he'd say.

"Yes. Grease," he repeated eventually. "I was hungry. Made a mess when I seared the pork on the pan. Grease spilled on the floor. I cleaned some of it up. Some of it I missed. Dad came back later that night, drunk. He slipped, hit his head on the corner of the table first." Kaleb makes a boom *sound. "Chair second."* Boom. *"Floor third."* Boom.

My lips tugged up. My teeth flashed. I believed with my whole heart that, for once, God cared about someone who deserved His attention.

It'd never been me, and that was okay.

As long as He saved Kaleb. As long as He brought him here to save me. "That's it? Are you serious?"

"I am." He remained as emotionless as ever. "Three blows to the head. He passed out while Mom and I were in our bedrooms, sleeping. He bled out. By the morning, he was dead."

Kaleb's death grip on my wrist tightens. A wake-up call.

A reminder to stay put, no matter what I hear.

"I don't need an accomplice," he growls. "And stop calling me son. I don't need a father figure."

Dr. Reynolds laughs, his *ha, ha, ha,* coming off condescending as fuck. Reflexively, I tug on my hand, desperate to break free from Kaleb's hold. Eager to round him and punch that asshole's nose.

Except the hand curled around my wrist isn't a human's hand. It isn't made of skin, tendons, muscles, and bones.

It's all steel, locking me in place.

"You don't?" Dr. Reynolds is missing the signs of Kaleb's growing aggression, or he just doesn't care. Either way, he goes on undeterred. "Seemed like you needed your old man before you killed him. He did set an example for you, didn't he? He taught you how to hit someone, how to do it right. The history of your hospital visits is proof of that. It tells a long story, years of *inexplicable* wounds and injuries."

Tears prick the corners of my eyes. My body presses against Kaleb's in an attempt to offer him comfort. To let him take, take, take everything from me. It'll always hurt, burn, and torture me to hear about the abuse.

Kaleb might brush it off. His cold, borderline sociopathic character might steel him. He might not care. The emotional scars might not be there.

I, on the other hand, can't stand it. I want to scream and cry. I want to run into my old home and drive a knife into his mom's eyes. If she isn't dead already, I'd stab every inch of her body until she is. And then some.

Not for allowing the abuse to go on for as long as it had. She must've been terrified. Terrorized. Scared out of her mind.

The fact that she hadn't bothered checking on him not once is what gets me. It fucks with my head.

I'm also so very proud of him for putting an end to it.

My teeth grind. My muscles are aching to cause serious damage. "Kaleb."

"Shh."

"He taught you how to make a person bleed." His doctor is fully committed to his monologue. So much so that he isn't commenting on our interaction. "Ironically, this knowledge he offered you was what cost him his life. Yes, I connected the dots. I figured out it was you, my boy."

He keeps repeating that stupid, mistaken observation, and that, too, makes me want to scream.

Kaleb's dad isn't the reason for his son's violent tendencies.

Kaleb didn't learn shit from his father. Kaleb was born this way.

For some unknown reason, he'd been doing his best to avoid harming anyone for years. Or maybe it'd been a desire he hadn't been aware of. Maybe that first blood drawn was what woke his dormant, dark desires up.

Regardless of what triggered it, it'd been there from day one.

My hot, cold, murderous stepbrother. My unhinged man.

For one satisfying moment, I imagine him killing his dad. Winding his fingers into his hair, then bashing his head in.

One time. Two times. Three.

Blood stains on the table. Brain matter tainting the floor.

Masterpiece.

"Where are they?" Kaleb, like me, doesn't bother correcting Dr. Shithead. He's deadly focused on us. On getting the information we need.

If our parents are dead, we could waltz right in. Otherwise, we have to be prepared for their resistance.

"I tried doing it your way." His doctor sounds like he's smiling. He has no clue who and what he's facing. "Tried getting inside your head. I started by shooting down the entire staff here. Then I bound these two privileged fucks to their dining room chairs."

Realization dawns on me as he rambles. He must've had my place bugged while I had my back turned to him. That's how he knew we'd be here today.

Stupid. Stupid, stupid, stupid, Shiloh.

"I slammed a hammer into her dad's face. Ripped your mother's heart out."

Neither Kaleb nor I react to this. Their deaths don't affect us.

On the contrary. It works in our favor.

Since they're gone and we weren't the ones to kill them, I'll inherit all of Dad's money.

Kaleb could hide while the police interview me. He'd stay away until the inheritance was settled.

After that, we'd be free to buy an island, maybe?

We could.

The way this night has unfolded, Kaleb and I could have everything.

Thanks to Dr. Reynolds.

Thanks to my asshole father as well. Even in his death, he insisted we be portrayed as the *perfect family*. His words, not mine, as he shared the contents of his will with me.

You and the world will have a constant reminder of who your father is.

I'll remember him, all right.

Years of manipulation. Of isolating me. The scar on my shoulder.

I'll remember it and take his money.

I'll put Dad's wealth to good use. Into saving Kaleb.

"I killed everyone here while I was wearing this." Dr. Reynolds laughs.

Kaleb makes a sound in the back of his throat. "What the fuck."

The thin thread that held my patience together snaps. I shove the fingers of my free hand between Kaleb's fist and my wrist, prying him off me.

"Shiloh." I hear his grunt as he tries to catch me.

I'm faster.

That poor excuse for a therapist is taunting my stepbrother. I won't let him. I won't.

When I make it to his side, my jaw drops. The fury that'd been boiling my blood morphs into something more. Rage I've never known before floods me.

Dr. Reynolds wasn't talking about what he was wearing on his body. His black coat and wrinkled dark pants are nothing special.

It's what he has in his hand. An identical mask to Kaleb's, the white latex one. He must've hidden it in his coat.

He's shoving it into Kaleb's face now.

"It was quite the experience. Murdering them with this on my face. I get why you did it. Finally, I do."

I'm one step forward, my hand outstretched to grasp it. Or his throat. His gray hair. The collar of the gray sweater he's wearing under his coat.

The first drops of rain start to fall on our heads. They slide between my mask and my face.

They're not what stops me from going after Dr. Reynolds.

It's Kaleb.

He launches at him first, pushing him hard on the chest. The older man flies back, landing on the floor. Half of his body is on the porch, with the other half inside the house.

"Take me with you!" His begging is pathetic. He sits up while Kaleb and I close in on him, pressing his hands together. "Please. I won't get in your way, I promise. Let me join you."

Kaleb wastes no time talking. He raises his large foot, kicking the older man's chest. The force of the kick has Dr. Reynolds flying further into the

house.

“Trick-or-treat!” The sound of the kids on the street is faint. It disappears altogether after I lock the front door behind me.

“Plea—” *Cough*, *cough*. “Please. Shiloh, help me out here.”

“Help you out?” Taking notes from Kaleb, I use my foot to shut Dr. Reynolds up. I slam my sneaker on his chest, pinning him to the floor. Behind me, Kaleb’s strong arms envelop my middle. His chin is on the top of my head. “I told you how I felt about you turning my brother into a science project. You were warned.”

I lean back on Kaleb, and he—as if we’ve done this a million times before—bears my weight. He helps me keep my foot on Dr. Reynolds’s chest while I lift the other one and kick him in the face.

Two teeth fly out, leaving a red trail on Dad’s marble floor.

“Good girl.” A whisper in my ear makes me lightheaded. Kaleb squeezes me to his body, his cock poking my back. A sweet, depraved distraction. “My good fucking girl. Give him hell.”

“You just had to come back.” I raise my foot a second time, leaving it in the air.

I don’t kick him.

“Oh, fuck yes.” Thanks to the fierce connection we share, Kaleb understands what I’m telling him without words.

He walks forward, helping me balance my two feet on Dr. Reynolds’s chest.

His fingers roam over my belly, pushing under the waistband of my jeans. With his other hand, he chokes me. Brings my ear to his mouth. “You’re so hot when you’re like this. Being your true self. It’s beautiful, little sister. Fucking stunning.”

“For both of you, I did it for both of you. I had to…” the doctor trails off.

He’s running out of air. I want to have my fun before he dies.

Kaleb presses his finger between my pussy lips, sliding it into my sex.

“Soaking. You’re such a dirty slut for me.” My head falls back on his shoulder while he finger-fucks me. I start protesting when he removes his finger. Then shut up when he presses it to my throbbing clit. “Make yourself come all over my hand, whore. Jump on him, use me. I won’t let go until your panties are ruined.”

I obey him. I jump once on top of Dr. Reynolds’s chest.

He chokes. Coughs. “Stop.”

“Don’t you dare.” Kaleb cuts off a little more of my air supply. “I’ll kill you if you listen to him. I’ll maim you and jerk off to your chopped limbs.”

“Yes.” It’s beyond unhinged, the things that his sickness does to me. I’m trembling with need, my stomach coiling. My climax building inside me. “Yes.”

I’m done testing the waters. I throw myself into it, wrapping my arms around Kaleb’s neck, and begin jumping in earnest. The friction of his finger as I hop up and down is getting me so wet. So desperate.

Crack, crack, crack. Dr. Reynolds’s ribs snap beneath me. The air he’s huffing is his last breath.

I haven’t come yet, though.

Kaleb pushes another two fingers inside me, pressing the heel of his hand to my clit for friction as I jump. “You’re drenching my hand. Such a good girl.”

“I’m your good girl,” I breathe, jumping on the dead man. “Yours.”

“Yes.” He runs his thumb along my throat. Squeezes and releases it. “Fucking my hand like that. Needing me like that. I’m going to make it my life’s mission to ruin you. I’ll humiliate and degrade you. I’ll come on your face while you’re crying for me. You’ll beg me to stop making you come over and over and fucking over.”

“Kaleb, please.”

He moans, and my orgasm shatters me. I scream into my mask, my head thrashing back, eyes glaring at the ceiling.

I’m too weak to keep jumping. Can’t move. Don’t need to.

Kaleb is there. He rubs me relentlessly, wringing every bit of this orgasm out of me.

“You think I’m done with you?” He drags me through the house. Past the bloody foyer. Through the living room and den.

I’m still catching my breath as I count three bodies of Dad’s staff along the way.

Shame, really.

Shame that I don’t care.

“I told you…” I growl.

We pass by other rooms, crossing the mansion until we end up in the dining room.

The room where Dad whipped and belted me. Where he and Kaleb's mom have been left, just as Dr. Reynolds said. Bound and dead.

My gaze finds Kaleb's masked face. "Don't ever be done with me."

He huffs and throws one of the chairs back, clearing up space for me around the table. He's made room for me to bend over.

Right there, next to my dead dad.

His mom is on the other side of the table, though Kaleb pays no attention to her.

She's not important tonight. All that matters is me and this middle finger we're giving my dad.

"I'll never be done with you." *Bam* and he pushes the side of my face on the solid old wood top of the table. "I'll always love you. Always."

My mask has gone askew. My eyes have nowhere to go other than to stare at the hole in Dad's forehead.

Kaleb leans in so I see his mask while he frees me of my jeans, pushing them down my thighs.

"I'll always love you." His cock thrusts inside me in one shove, up to the hilt, his hands firm on my hips as he starts pounding his pierced dick into me. "Fuck, fuck, fuck. Shiloh. You're so good. The fucking worst. *Fuck.*"

The table rattles as he pummels into me with abandon. He impales me until my breath leaves my body. Until I come around his cock, until my throat is sore from screaming his name.

His orgasm chases mine, and he empties himself inside me.

"Take it. Every drop." He shoves more of himself inside me with each word. "Can't wait to have you swollen. To watch our child grow inside you. Our baby. Ours."

"Ours," I repeat. "Ours."

I'm no longer looking at my mutilated father. Kaleb's pulling me up, my back up against his sturdy chest. He tears off my mask, then his.

His cock is still inside me while he tilts my head to the side, his lips crashing to mine.

"Ours," he growls, and I nod in agreement.

Because it terrifies me to say no to him.

But, most importantly, because of this one simple truth.

I'm his and he's mine.

Nothing and no one will ever come between us again.

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EPILOGUE

KALEB

Awareness courses through me. Raises the hair at the back of my neck. It's as real as the ocean water I'm sitting in. As hot as the sun hovering in the sky. My skin prickles.

Though it isn't the whitebaits that brush against my legs.

Someone's behind me. Watching me.

Silently.

They're far enough that their shadow doesn't cast over me.

I'm not supposed to notice their presence.

I do, and this isn't right. I'm usually the one to be the silent observer. The stalker.

The freak.

This time, it's different. I'm the one being watched.

Onyx and I are, to be exact.

"Mommy's being sneaky, isn't she?" I whisper into my daughter's soft brown hair so only she can hear me. "Do we tell her we know she's there? Or maybe we should stay quiet. She does like being a stalker these days."

She responds by searching for my forearms that I have wrapped around her. Her chubby fingers flex and grasp me as she wiggles her feet in the clear waters of the West Atlantic Ocean.

Something that sounds like a giggle escapes her as salty drops land on her cheeks.

A smile tugs at my lips as I wipe them off her.

A smile, yes.

It happens often these days. For over a year now, if I'm being honest.

These smiles started reaching my eyes a month after Shiloh and I'd bought and moved to this private island. It was the same month we found out she was pregnant.

We could afford it, easily. After our parents' deaths were pinned on Dr. Reynolds. After it was proven that we'd killed him in self-defense.

Shiloh's dad's estate had been settled. After that, she sold every property he owned. Every share in his company. Every cent was transferred to numerous bank accounts in the Cayman Islands to a woman named Shiloh Payne, the wife of Kaleb Payne.

True, it would've been safer to change our first names, too.

But I dare anyone to try coming for us. The small army we hired to protect our island wouldn't let any hostile entity get anywhere near our small piece of heaven.

I don't mind outsourcing. What's safer for Shiloh and Onyx works for me.

Especially when my wife lets me be as violent as I need whenever I need it. She lets me cut her. Spank her. Welt her. Mark her with my teeth.

Her pain and blood satisfy the depraved hunger that simmers inside me.

Her eyes are as blue as the ocean. Her cries of pain. Her mouth and cunt and ass, that are mine to violate any day or night.

Her soul.

From the very beginning, her soul was what drew me to her. What made me love her. First as my little sister, then as a woman.

It gets her off just as much.

My wife.

She's so good. So understanding. Calm in the face of my madness. Unhinged when the mood strikes.

The woman who transformed me from an outcast to a big brother and then to a husband.

And eventually to a father.

My wife.

"Well?" I tickle my daughter's tummy over her black swimsuit. "What do you say?"

"Ha!" she exclaims, the sound warming me down to my bones.

"Is that so?"

"Ha!" Her hands create tiny waves in the water, splashing more of it on her and me. "Ha!"

I can’t help it. I laugh at how cute she is.

Unbelievable.

Onyx was born six months ago, and she already owns our hearts. She has since the day she was born, this little girl with gold specks in her blue eyes.

A shadow looms over us. The dark figure moves to my side and, ah, there she is.

“Wife.”

Air surges into my lungs when Shiloh rests her head on my shoulder. “You two look adorable together.”

“Onyx is cute, but me?” I fasten my grip on our baby with one arm, freeing a hand to tip Shiloh’s chin up. Meeting her warm gaze. “Did you just call a serial killer adorable?”

Her lips curve into a sweet smile.

She doesn’t mind it when I say I’m a serial killer out loud. As long as the staff and the midwife we hired to live here aren’t on this side of the island. They have their own home, we have ours.

Not like they care. Thanks to Shiloh’s bastard of a dad, they’re fairly compensated for their confidentiality.

Besides, we won’t be living here forever. Shiloh paid off a few of her dad’s friends at the bureau, and they assured us that in five years, we’d be able to return to the States. They’re hard at work to erase any sign that we ever existed.

“Like what you see?” she teases, her hand covering my forearm, holding Onyx with me.

“Hmm.” I rake my gaze along her body. Along the blue bikini that matches her eyes. Her sun-kissed skin. The new curves that are so fucking gorgeous on her. The fresh cuts on her thighs from last night.

Back to her expectant eyes.

“Well?”

She knows the answer. I use my words and hands to worship her every second of every day.

However, I sure as fuck don’t mind indulging her.

“You’re as beautiful as your heart, Mrs. Payne.” I brush my lips to hers. “If we weren’t married already, I would’ve proposed right this fucking minute.”

“Ha!”

We both laugh. Onyx likes curse words just as much as she loves the scary bedtime stories we read to her. The mask I wear from time to time.

“Let me hold her.” Shiloh’s voice is full of longing, and I give her what she wants. She feathers kisses all over Onyx’s face, then cradles her in her arms. “You and Daddy have fun together?”

“Ha!” Our daughter wiggles her legs, grasping at Shiloh’s arms. “Ha!”

“Motherhood suits you,” I tell her for the millionth time as I watch the two loves of my life together. “You were meant for it, Shi.”

She hums, and it’s so out of tune that I laugh again. I tuck a lock of her hair behind her ear.

What a fucking miracle that I, of all people, get to have *this*.

A family. Happiness. Unconditional love and acceptance.

“You make the perfect Dad yourself, Kaleb.” She inches closer, allowing me to wrap her in my arms.

We sit there as the horizon and future stretch before us.

My woman. My family.

I’ll always be here to protect them. To love them.

To kill for them.

Mine.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Writing spicy books about dirty talkers and the women who love them.

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